1977

The Abolition of the Danish Atlantic Slave Trade.

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THE ABOLITION OF THE DANISH ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of History

by
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May, 1977

EXAMINATION AND THESIS REPORT

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March 28, 1977

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author wishes to thank Professor Robert B. Holtman, his major professor, and Professors Sidney L. Cohen and Patrick C. Lipscomb, III, for their assistance. The moral support of his parents was also invaluable. Of particular importance, however, was the assistance and, occasionally, the prodding of his wife, Linda, to whom this dissertation is dedicated.

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ABSTRACT

In the seventeenth century Denmark-Norway joined other north European states in building forts on the Gold Coast of Africa and in seeking islands in the Caribbean on which to cultivate tropical products. The Danish West India Company, established in 1671, permanently occupied the uninhabited island of St. Thomas in 1672. In 1718 the Danish company settled St. John, and in 1733 Denmark purchased St. Croix from France. St. Croix developed into the principal supplier of raw sugar for Denmark, where sugar refining became an important industry. The export of surplus sugar from Denmark to Baltic countries comprised an important part of the nation's foreign trade in the second half of the eighteenth century.

Initial attempts at using indentured servants from Scandinavia as agricultural laborers failed, and by the early eighteenth century African slaves formed the source of labor for the island's sugar and cotton plantations. Foreign slavers as well as Danish ships supplied slaves to the Danish West Indies, though the Crown frequently sought to restrict the trade to Danish slavers. The slave trade on Danish vessels thrived when France and England were at war, for Danish ships then supplied the French sugar islands with slaves. But in peacetime the trade languished. By the late 1780s the slave trade stood condemned on humanitarian grounds in the eyes of thoughtful Europeans, including prominent members of the

Danish government.

In August 1791 the Danish Crown, at the request of Finance Minister Ernst Schimmelmann, appointed a committee of government officials to investigate the slave trade. The Committee on the Slave Trade, guided and dominated by Schimmelmann, decided that the slave trade should be abolished after a ten-year transition period. In the meantime, the Crown encouraged a rapid increase in the slave population and urged the planters to improve the treatment of their slaves in hopes that the labor force would become self-perpetuating by 1803. Schimmelmann knew that no Caribbean sugar island had yet been able to sustain its slave population without access to the Atlantic slave trade. But he and the committee hoped that the planters, faced with the prospect of abolition, would adopt amelioration out of a sense of enlightened self-interest. The planters, however, maintained their traditional interest in short-term profits and apparently did not take the threat of abolition seriously. Slave deaths continued to exceed births, and in 1802 the planters asked for a continuation of the slave trade.

In May 1804 Schimmelmann, with strong support from Johan Philip Rosenstand-Goiske, a member of the government agency in charge of West Indian affairs, got the Council of State to postpone a decision on the planters' appeal. The delay thus obtained proved permanent, and Denmark became the first European slave-trading nation to outlaw the slave trade.

CHAPTER I

Introduction: The Danish West Indies and Slave Trade to 1784

Denmark-Norway was the first European slave-trading power to abolish its slave trade from Africa to its possessions in the Americas and to prohibit its subjects from participating in any aspect of the Atlantic slave trade. It did so by means of a royal edict issued on March 16, 1792, which stated that the trade in slaves between Danish Guinea and the Danish West Indies was to cease on January 1, 1803. In the meantime, the slave trade to the Danish West Indies was to be encouraged so as to provide the plantations with a labor force large enough to enable the islands to prosper after 1802 without reliance on further slave imports.[1] Despite opposition in Copenhagen and in the West Indies, participation in the trade became illegal for Danish subjects in 1803.

The kingdom of Denmark-Norway began trading with Asia, the Guinea Coast of Africa, and the West Indies in the seventeenth century, inspired by the success of the Dutch and the proposals of Dutch merchants resident in Copenhagen.[2] The Danish East India

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[1]Danish State Archives, Copenhagen, Vestindisk-guineisk Rente samt Generaltoldkammer, Om Negerhandelens Afskaffelse, Forordning om Negerhandelen, March 16, 1792, p. 2.

[2]Georg Nørregaard, Guldkysten: de danske Etablissementer i Guinea, Vol. VIII of Vore gamle Tropekolonier, ed. by Johannes

Company, established in 1616, grew out of a plan of two Dutch merchants who arrived in Copenhagen in 1615.[3] In 1618 the company sent its first expedition to Ceylon, and in 1620 the Danes took possession of Tranquebar on the southeast coast of India; for more than two centuries Tranquebar served as headquarters for Danish Asian trade.[4]

Competition with the Swedes, long intense in the Baltic, encouraged Danish trading ventures to Africa and the New World. In December 1624 Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden granted a Dutch merchant the privilege of establishing a Swedish company to conduct such overseas trade; in January 1625 Christian IV of Denmark (1588-1648) did the same.[5] Nothing came of this Danish project, however, mainly because of the impoverishment of Denmark resulting from Christian IV's intervention in the Thirty Years' War.[6]

Only in the early 1650s did Danish efforts at trade with Africa and the New World revive. In 1651 the Glueckstadt Company was established at Glueckstadt, a town on the Elbe founded in 1615 by

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Brøndsted (8 vols., 2d. ed.; Copenhagen: Fremad, 1966), p. 12. In the eighteenth century Denmark-Norway, hereafter referred to as Denmark, also included Iceland, Greenland, the Faroe Islands, the duchy of Schleswig and parts of the duchy of Holstein.

[3]Gunnar Olsen, Dansk Ostindien 1616-1732: de Ostindiske Kompagniers Handel paa Indien, Vol. V of Vore gamle Tropekolonier, pp. 35 and 49.

[4]Ibid., pp. 76-78.

[5]Nørregaard, Guldkysten, pp. 19-21.

[6]J. O. Bro-Jorgensen, Dansk Vestindien indtil 1755: Kolonisation og Kompagnistyre, Vol. I of Vore gamle Tropekolonier, p. 12.

Christian IV as a base for trade with western Europe. A few years later the Danes began building forts on the Gold Coast, where they were to remain for 200 years.[7] That smaller naval powers such as Denmark were able to enter the fiercely competitive African trade was due in large part to the Africans' policy of promoting competition among as many European states as possible in order to obtain better trade arrangements. The chieftains resisted stubbornly any attempt by a European company to establish a monopoly along a stretch of the Gold Coast; thus the Danes, English and Dutch coexisted on the Gulf of Guinea in Accra, capital of modern Ghana, competing with one another to the benefit of the Africans.[8] Because of the risky nature of the West African trade, European merchants sought protection in chartered trading companies enjoying a national monopoly.[9]

In 1652 the first Danish ships sailed to the West Indies, and in 1653 Frederik III (1648-70) chartered a West India Company. The new company was not awarded a monopoly, but it received privileges with regard to payment of customs duties. The Danes wished to acquire tobacco, sugar, ginger, and indigo in exchange for Icelandic lamb, dried fish, whale oil, and Danish bread and beef.[10] Though as

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[7]Nørregaard, Guldkysten, pp. 24-27

[8]Kwane Yeboa Daaku, Trade and Politics on the Gold Coast, 1600-1720: A Study of the African Reaction to European Trade (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 37.

[9]Robert O. Collins, Europeans in Africa (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), p. 28.

[10]Bro-Jørgensen, Dansk Vestindien, pp. 13-14.

yet the Danes did not participate in the Atlantic slave trade, interest in such commerce was expressed by a Copenhagen merchant, who in 1653 appealed to the Spanish government for permission to sell slaves to the Spanish American colonies.[11]

Trade with the West Indies was interrupted by the war with Sweden from 1657 to 1660, but in 1662 a ship was sent out by the first Danish West India Company with the task of locating uninhabited islands--of which there were still many--suitable for occupation.[12] In 1665 the Danish company proposed settling St. Thomas, a small (slightly over 33 square miles), mountainous island with an excellent harbor. Later that year Danish settlers arrived on St. Thomas, but this first colonizing effort fell victim to disease, pirate raids, a hurricane, and lack of support from the company, which was desperately short of capital and soon collapsed.[13]

By 1671 conditions for creating a larger, stronger West India Company were improved. The new king, Christian V (1670-99), was eager for enterprises which promised glory for himself and his realm; and his trusted advisor, Peter Schumacher, wished to encourage trade and industry by government action. In addition, a Board of Trade

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[11]Waldemar Westergaard, The Danish West Indies under Company Rule, 1671-1754; with a Supplementary Chapter, 1755-1917 (New York: MacMillan Company, 1917), p. 21.

[12]J.H. Parry, Trade and Dominion; The European Oversea Empires in the Eighteenth Century (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), pp. 42-43. Spain had largely ignored the Lesser Antilles, stretching from Puerto Rico in a great arc east and south to Trinidad. Other powers began settling these islands in the seventeenth century, a process which an enfeebled Spain could not resist.

[13]Bro-Jørgensen, Dansk Vestindien, pp. 17-26.

(Kommercekollegium) headed by the king's energetic half-brother was created in 1668 to promote commerce.[14] Direct involvement of the royal family, lacking in the case of the first company, would be important for the success of any new endeavor in the West Indies, for it was the court and high nobility, and not the relatively small merchant class, which possessed the necessary capital.[15]

A new Danish West India Company received its charter on March 11, 1671; it was authorized to settle St. Thomas and other available areas in the Americas, to defend and administer these areas, and to exercise a monopoly on trade with them. The three directors of the company, all of them also members of the Board of Trade, were appointed by the Crown. The King invested a large sum and encouraged others, in particular the wealthier nobles, to do the same. The King further agreed to provide two ships to be used by the company for three years.[16]

A Danish expedition commanded by Jørgen Iversen, a Dane who had spent several years on St. Kitts and knew the Caribbean well, reached St. Thomas in May 1672. Soon the Danes were joined by Dutch, English, French, and even Danish planters from nearby islands--accompanied by their African slaves--seeking on the neutral Danish island refuge from the effects of the Dutch War (1672-78). These refugees, already acclimated and experienced in producing

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[14]Westergaard, Danish West Indies, p. 31.

[15]Bro-Jørgensen, Dansk Vestindien, p. 43.

[16]Ibid., pp. 44-46.

tropical products, were a critically important source of population growth for the new colony, for of the 324 Danes and Norwegians (who were mainly convicts, male and female) sent out by the company between 1672-75, only 64 survived the journey and the dangerous first half-year on the island. Included among the foreign colonists were small tobacco farmers and artisans driven from the older islands by the advance of sugar cultivation with its accompanying gang slavery; on St. Thomas these immigrants planted mainly tobacco and cotton, crops which required few if any slaves. To promote the rapid development of St. Thomas the company allotted land to immigrants in exchange for only a nominal rent--at first usually a couple of chickens a year.[17]

The Glueckstadt Company, no longer able to carry on trade with the Gold Coast, renounced its privileges in 1673. In 1674 the West India Company took over the African trade and became the West India and Guinea Company. Except for a brief period in the early 1690s, when Danish Guinea and St. Thomas were leased to private merchants, the company governed both the Danish forts on the Gold Coast and the Danish West Indies until 1754.[18]

As sugar cultivation grew in importance on St. Thomas in the last years of the seventeenth century, the need for laborers increased dramatically. An attempt to solve the labor problem by

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[17] Ibid., pp. 55ff.

[18] Nørregaard, Guldkysten, pp. 86-87. From 1690-94 St. Thomas was run by the Norwegian merchant, Jørgen Thormøhlen.

using Danish and Norwegian indentured servants and convicts failed. Indentured servants were difficult to recruit, especially as St. Thomas acquired a reputation as a graveyard for whites. Virtually no one who could make a living in Denmark was willing to go to St. Thomas as an indentured servant, so only the poorest, and sickliest, signed contracts. In the early years of settlement indentured servants and convicts were treated as brutally as the African slaves--Governor Iversen (1672-80) beat several to death as punishment for failing to work hard enough. After 1701 convicts were seldom sent to the island, and after 1706 the company stopped selling indentured servants to planters, for Scandinavian laborers, when they survived at all in the warm climate, were said to be capable of doing only about one-fourth as much work as black slaves.[19] Therefore the Danish colony, in common with other European colonies in the Caribbean, sought a solution to the labor problem by importing slaves from Africa, for which enterprise a Brandenburg slave-trading company had provided the Danes with a model and a stimulus.

The Brandenburg African Company had established forts on the Gold Coast in the early 1680s, with the goal of building up a profitable trade in slaves to Spanish America. The company needed a base in the Caribbean and, in 1685, after failing to acquire either St. Vincent or St. Croix from France, signed with the Danish West India and Guinea Company a thirty-year accord which granted the Brandenburgers a strip of land on St. Thomas for a factory and a

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[19]Bro-Jørgensen, Dansk Vestindien, pp. 50ff, 92-93, 174.

plantation and gave them the right to import slaves from the Gold Coast and export them to European colonies in the Caribbean. The Brandenburgers promised to provide the Danish company with slaves at a low price. This promise was important for St. Thomas, for as yet there was no regular slave trade conducted by Danish vessels.[20]

During the War of the League of Augsburg the Brandenburg company thrived by smuggling slaves into the English islands, especially the nearby English Virgin Islands, which, like St. Thomas, were experiencing a rapid growth of sugar cultivation with a corresponding increase in the demand for slaves. After 1699 the Brandenburg African Company stopped transporting slaves from Africa to the West Indies, perhaps because of the withdrawal of important Dutch stockholders and a loss of interest in the company by the King, Frederick I. The company's factory on St. Thomas slowly declined until, in 1715, the Brandenburgers' treaty with the Danish company expired, and the Brandenburgers left the island.

In 1696, however, the temporary success of the slave-trading venture of the Brandenburg company, coupled with the need to assure St. Thomas an adequate labor supply for its expanding sugar plantations, had prompted Governor Johan Lorentz to urge the Danish West India and Guinea Company to begin a regular slave trade of its own.[21] Accordingly, in 1698 a Danish ship carried 280 slaves from the Gold

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[20]C.C. Alberti, "Den danske Slavehandels Historie," Nyt Historisk Tidsskrift, 2d. series, III (1850), 206-07; Nørregarrd, Guldkysten, pp. 87ff.

[21]Westergaard, Danish West Indies, p. 145.

Coast to St. Thomas, beginning a regular Atlantic traffic in slaves on Danish vessels.[22]

The population of St. Thomas numbered about 100 in 1673, and reached 331 in 1680, including 175 slaves, either brought in by foreign planters or purchased by Governor Iversen from foreign slave traders.[23] By 1691, the population had risen to 1,136 including 751 slaves. Of the 101 plantations on St. Thomas, eighty-seven were planted in cotton, only five in sugar. But sugar cultivation expanded rapidly in the 1690s and early 1700s, mainly at the expense of tobacco farming, so that forty out of 160 plantations in 1715 were planted solely in sugar. The rapid growth of the slave population indicated the advance of labor-intensive sugar production: by 1720-21, the number of slaves reached 4,504; the free population grew much more slowly, to 524.[24] As elsewhere in the West Indies, small planters were being squeezed out by larger ones using gang slavery to produce sugar.[25] Sugar was a rich man's crop; it brought large profits once the initial capital investment had been made. Sugar planters bought

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[22]Bro-Jørgensen, Dansk Vestindien, pp. 162-64. The Danish East India Company had traded in slaves prior to this, transporting them from the southeast coast of India to the slave market at Malacca. See Olsen, Dansk Ostindien, p. 207.

[23]Westergaard, Danish West Indies, pp. 40-41.

[24]Bro-Jørgensen, Dansk Vestindien, pp. 171ff. The figures given for the slave population are minimum ones only, for in 1691 a head tax, or kopskat, was introduced, which thereafter gave slave masters a good reason to try to conceal the actual number of slaves in their possession.

[25]Westergaard, Danish West Indies, pp. 123ff.

out small tobacco farmers and brought in a stream of African slaves to work the fields and serve as artisans, displacing the class of white laborers and advancing a process which produced a population sharply divided between a mass of black slaves and a small group of white planters.[26]

Though the Danish West India and Guinea Company continued to engage in the slave trade until the company was dissolved in 1754, profits from the trade were rare.[27] The difficulties faced by the Danish company were similar to those faced by other companies engaged in the African trade: losses at sea, dishonest employees, the high costs of maintaining forts on the Gold Coast, and high death rates on its slave ships. Of the twenty ships owned by the company between 1697-1733, eight were lost at sea.[28] Slave deaths on Danish slave ships in the period 1698-1754 amounted to 25 per cent, with only about 7,500 slaves out of some 10,000 surviving the trip from Africa to the West Indies.[29] Nevertheless, the company continued to transport slaves to the West Indies, though it seldom had more than two ships engaged in the trade at any time, and its activity in the first two decades of the eighteenth century served primarily to supplement the

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[26]J. H. Parry and P. M. Sherlock, A Short History of the West Indies (London: MacMillan and Co., Ltd., 1956), pp. 66ff.

[27]Nørregaard, Guldkysten, p. 149.

[28]Westergaard, Danish West Indies, pp. 151-52.

[29]Nørregaard, Guldkysten, p. 146-47. Slave deaths on Danish ships would have been near the norm of 18 per cent for other European slave-trading powers were it not for the loss in 1706 of a Danish slave ship with 820 slaves on board.

efforts of Dutch interlopers. Indeed, the company instructed its employees on St. Thomas to encourage interlopers to sell slaves in the Danish colony--thereby disregarding the monopoly on the trade held by the company--but urged that the company have exclusive right to buy slaves so that a profit could be made subsequently by selling the slaves to local planters.[30]

From the start of colonization on St. Thomas, the West India and Guinea Company had hoped to acquire other islands, and had on several occasions in the late seventeenth century sent men to live on the uninhabited island of St. John, about four miles east of St. Thomas. Englishmen from the Leeward Islands drove out the Danes each time. Finally, in 1718, when all agricultural land on St. Thomas was in use, a well-armed force of twenty planters, five soldiers, and sixteen slaves was sent to occupy St. John. Defying English demands for their withdrawal, and the threatening visits of two English frigates, the Danish governor stood firm, and by 1733 there were 109 plantations on the island, with 208 whites and 1,087 slaves working them.[31]

Even after acquiring St. John, the Danish company lacked an adequate basis in the West Indies for production of tropical products, for St. Thomas and St. John were both very small, only thirty-three and twenty-one square miles respectively. In 1733, at the urging of the Danish crown, the West India and Guinea Company purchased the

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[30]Alberti, "Den danske Slavehandel," p. 214.

[31]Bro-Jørgensen, Dansk Vestindien, pp. 216-22.

unoccupied French island of St. Croix for 750,000 livres (164,000 rigsdaler), with the Crown providing a large part of the initial payment. St. Croix lay forty miles south of St. Thomas, and with eighty-four square miles was large enough to become a major center of sugar production.[32]

An attempt to encourage settlement of St. Croix by Danish subjects was largely unsuccessful. From the start the island was dominated by immigrant planters from the nearby English islands. The lures of virgin soil and religious toleration attracted a number of English Catholic planters from Montserrat, who with their slaves added about one thousand people to the population of St. Croix in the first years after the Danish takeover.[33]

St. Croix grew rapidly to become the Danish sugar island par excellence. The slave population increased between 1742 and 1755 from 1,906 to 8,897. At the same time, agricultural production on St. Thomas was declining after peaking in the 1720s, when the slave population there had reached 4,490; by 1754 the number of slaves on St. Thomas had fallen to 3,481. On St. John, colonized more recently than St. Thomas, production continued to expand between 1739 and 1755, with the number of slaves there rising from 1,414 to 2,031.[34]

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[32] Ibid., pp. 240ff.

[33] Ibid., pp. 250ff. Religious toleration, though illegal in Denmark, was practiced on St. Thomas out of practical necessity from the earliest years of settlement.

[34] Ibid., pp. 269ff.

Despite acquisition of St. Croix, the West India and Guinea Company continued to be troubled by the high costs of administering and defending its possessions. By mid-century there was growing opposition in Denmark to continuing the special privileges enjoyed by the company, as these increasingly were viewed as harmful to economic growth. The price of sugar in Denmark, for one thing, was 30 per cent above the price at Hamburg.[35] In 1749 the Board of Trade decided that the company's near-monopoly over the sugar-refining industry in Denmark hindered further development, and from 1750 a number of new sugar refineries were given permission to begin operation.[36] On top of this setback for the company came the loss of three ships at sea in 1751-52, and in 1753 a slave revolt on another ship caused heavy financial loss. In that same year the St. Croix Burger Council (the planters), furious at new trade restrictions aimed at strengthening the company's trade monopoly,[37] urged Frederik V (1746-66) to take over the Danish West Indies.[38]

In May 1754 the Board of Trade recommended that the Crown buy out the company. The president of the company was Adam Gottlob

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[35]P.O. Sveistrup and Richard Willerslev, Den danske Sukkerhandels og Sukkerproduktions Historie (Copenhagen: Nordisk Forlag, 1945), pp. 31-32.

[36]Ibid., pp. 41ff. Prior to this there had been only a refinery in Schleswig and one in Copenhagen to provide some competition for the big refinery owned by the company in Copenhagen.

[37]It was trade restrictions more than anything else which angered European colonists throughout the Americas. See D. K. Fieldhouse, The Colonial Empires: A Comparative Survey from the Eighteenth Century (New York: Delacorte Press, 1966), p. 88.

[38]Westergaard, Danish West Indies, pp. 238-39.

von Moltke, the king's favorite; he accepted the Crown's offer to pay the shareholders the par value of their stock (500 rigsdaler per share) and assume all debts owed by and to the company.[39] Since shares in the company had sold for only 300 rigsdaler in the years immediately preceding the sale, the shareholders did very well.[40]

From the late seventeenth century the main reason for maintaining Danish forts on the Gold Coast had been to supply slaves to the Danish West Indies; trade in gold and ivory was not extensive enough to justify the continued expense of maintaining the Danish forts. Yet it probably would have been cheaper to buy slaves in the West Indies from the Dutch and the English. A slave trade on Danish ships was justifiable only as a means of guaranteeing a sufficient labor supply to the Danish company's sugar islands in case ships of the other maritime powers were for some reason unable to meet the demand.[41]

Altogether, approximately 15,800 slaves were imported into the Danish West Indies between 1687-1754. After 1715 Danish vessels provided most of the slaves sold in the Danish islands: in the period 1739-54, for instance, only Danish slave ships supplied the islands, landing about 3,675 slaves there in twenty-one voyages.[42]

In 1755, when the Crown took over the Danish West Indies

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[39] Ibid., p. 240.

[40] Bro-Jørgensen, Dansk Vestindien, pp. 280-81.

[41] Nørregaard, Guldkysten, p. 154.

[42] Westergaard, Danish West Indies, pp. 320ff.

and the forts on the Gold Coast, trade with the former company possessions was opened to all Danish subjects. But the entire export of the islands was to go to Denmark, and only Danish products, except when such were unavailable--which was often enough--were to be imported by the islands.[43]

The end of the restrictive rule of the West India and Guinea Company encouraged a major expansion of the slave trade to the Danish West Indies, in particular from 1755-77 and from 1792-1803. Danish slavers took advantage of the colonial wars of the second half of the eighteenth century to sell slaves to the American colonies of the warring powers, especially those of France.[44]

To govern the islands after the Crown took over, a centralized administration was established. A governor-general residing on St. Croix was the top executive official in the islands, with a commander (kommandant) on St. Thomas looking after affairs there and on St. John. A miniature bureaucracy grew up, consisting of warehouse managers, bookkeepers, customs agents, weigh-masters, and surveyors. Many of the men who staffed these positions had served earlier in Africa and India; a class of Danish colonial officials was making its appearance. A new government agency was created in 1760 in Copenhagen to take charge of West Indian affairs, the West

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[43]P. P. Sveistrup, Bidrag til de tidligere Dansk-Vestindiske Øers økonomiske Historie med saerlig Henblik paa Sukkerproduktion og Sukkerhandel (Copenhagen: Nordisk Forlag, 1942), p. 91.

[44]"Udtog af Forestillingen til Kongen angaaende Negerhandelens Afskaffelse," Minerva, Copenhagen, April 1792, p. 53.

India-Guinea Treasury and General Customs Department (Vestindisk-guineisk Rente samt Generaltoldkammer), usually referred to as the General Customs Department (Generaltoldkammer). It had far-reaching power over the Danish West Indies.[45]

In 1764, in an attempt to increase the slave trade to St. Croix, the right to participate in the slave trade to the Danish West Indies was extended to include foreigners, who thenceforth were allowed to sell slaves in the Danish colonies in exchange for sugar and cotton, a privilege clearly in conflict with the prevailing mercantilist view that favored confining shipment of colonial raw materials to the home country. As an additional stimulus to the slave trade, no customs duty was to be paid on slaves brought directly from Danish Guinea to the Danish West Indies in Danish ships. Danish slave ships carrying slaves not purchased in Danish Guinea, as well as all foreign ships regardless of the origin of their slaves, had to pay the duty.[46]

In 1766 the Danish forts on the Gold Coast were assigned to a new slave-trading company, the Royal Chartered Danish-Guinea Company (det kgl. oktroyerede danske guineiske Kompagni), better known as Bargum's Trading Association (det Bargumske Handelssocietet). This company sent more than 3,000 slaves to the West Indies from 1767 to 1776 and sold 1,873 slaves to French slavers between 1770

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[45]Jens Vibaek, Dansk Vestindien, 1755-1848; Vestindiens Storhedstid. Vore gamle Tropekolonier, II, ed. by Johannes Brøndsted (2d. ed; Copenhagen: Fremad, 1966), pp. 11ff.

[46]Alberti, "Den danske Slavehandels Historie," pp. 220-22.

and 1773.[47] St. Croix imported more than 6,000 slaves from Africa between 1767-77; a great many of these slaves must have been brought in on foreign vessels.[48] Bargum's Trading Association encountered problems in the mid-1770s, and in 1776 the Crown resumed control over the forts in Danish Guinea.[49]

The slave population on St. Croix grew from 8,897 in 1755 to 15,699 in 1765 and to 23,834 in 1775. On St. Thomas the slave population increased from 3,481 in 1754 to 3,979 in 1775; on St. John the number of slaves grew from 2,031 in 1755 to 2,355 in 1775. After 1775 a slight decline occurred until the early 1790s; in 1792, the year the abolition edict was promulgated, the slave population on St. Croix was 22,240.[50]

All increases were due to imports of slaves from outside the islands, for as elsewhere in the West Indies, the slaves' death rate was consistently higher than their birth rate.[51] From 1767 to 1777, approximately 1,160 slaves were imported and retained each year on St. Croix. These slaves came both from Africa and from other

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[47]Nørregaard, Guldkysten, pp. 193ff.

[48]Svend Green-Pedersen, "The Scope and Structure of the Danish Negro Slave Trade," Scandinavian Economic History Review, XIX, No. 2 (1971), 171.

[49]Nørregaard, Guldkysten, p. 205.

[50]Green-Pedersen, "The Scope . . . of the Danish . . . Slave Trade," pp. 150ff.

[51]Patrick Richardson, Empire and Slavery (London: Longmans, Green and Co., Ltd., 1968), p. 12. For instance, on Barbados between 1712 and 1768, the slave population increased at an annual rate of only 465, despite the importation of an annual average of 3,570 slaves.

islands in the West Indies, in particular from the British Leeward Islands. Yet there was an average yearly increase of only about 660 slaves. From this it appears that St. Croix, as other West Indian sugar islands, had an excess of deaths over births; for St. Croix it was about 500 a year.[52] Without a continued supply of slaves, the slave population, so long as its living conditions were not improved, would decline.

The prosperity of the Danish West Indies as plantation colonies always depended on the amount of rainfall. Droughts were frequent, rainfall irregular and violent. In the decade 1828-38, the average annual rainfall on St. Thomas was forty-three inches, not a large amount for an island in the tropics.[53] Once the original forests had been destroyed, erosion became a serious problem as torrential rains washed away much of the topsoil. On none of the islands was the soil especially rich, and overuse, a situation aggravated by the prevalence of monoculture, soon began to exhaust it.[54] St. Thomas, however, possessed perhaps the best harbor in the Lesser Antilles, a fact which, coupled with favorable legislation, made it a major Caribbean trading center in the second half of the eighteenth century.[55]

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[52]Green-Pedersen, "The Scope . . . of the Danish . . . Slave Trade," pp. 155-56.

[53]Westergaard, Danish West Indies, p. 5.

[54]Bro-Jørgensen, Dansk Vestindien, p. 269.

[55]Sveistrup, De Dansk-Vestindiske Øers økonomiske Historie, p. 6.

After 1764 St. Thomas and St. John were separated economically from St. Croix; legislation thenceforth aimed at making St. Thomas a transit trade center, while St. Croix was to concentrate on sugar production for the Danish market. St. Thomas and St. John were made into free-trade areas, with foreign merchants allowed to settle there and conduct trade with the Americas and, after 1767, with Europe as well, though Danish ships in the European trade enjoyed preferential customs duties.[56] Especially during wartime St. Thomas was an important center of the Caribbean transit slave trade.[57]

The slave trade to the Danish West Indies declined after 1777 as an edict of that year prohibited importation of slaves into the islands aboard foreign ships and again required that all sugar exported from the islands be sent to Denmark.[58] Furthermore, only ships built in Denmark and operated by Danish subjects resident in Europe could engage in the slave trade. Crews were to be Danish whenever possible, and captains and first mates had to be Danish in every instance. Also, customs duties were imposed on slaves imported into the Danish islands: four rigsdaler for an adult slave, two for an adolescent, and one for a child.[59]

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[56]Vibaek, Dansk Vestindien, p. 64.

[57]Green-Pedersen, "The Scope . . . of the Danish . . . Slave Trade," p. 158.

[58]These restrictions were motivated primarily by a desire to bolster the foreign commerce of Copenhagen and to hinder the illegal export of sugar from the Danish West Indies to Amsterdam.

[59]Alberti, "Den danske Slavehandel," pp. 226ff.

Treatment of slaves in the sense of day-to-day living conditions in the second half of the eighteenth century was apparently as harsh in the Danish islands as elsewhere in the West Indies; the slaves were constantly undernourished and were quite simply worked to death. They could be easily replaced by means of the Atlantic slave trade: "So long as the slave trade remained open, slaves were greatly abused in all [slave] systems."[60]

At mid-century a typical St. Croix plantation of 150 acres was worked by about 48 slaves.[61] Their working day was long, then and later in the century as well, beginning at 5 a.m. and lasting, with a rest period during midday, until 6 or 7 p.m. During the harvest season they worked even longer. The slaves were given Sunday off so that they could tend their gardens and visit the towns to sell produce at the Sunday market.[62] During the second half of the eighteenth century, as land prices rose, the slaves' nutritional standards declined, for planters tended to enlarge the area planted in sugar at the expense of the slaves' garden plots and to supply more of the slaves' food themselves.[63] Around 1790

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[60]Eugene D. Genovese, "The Treatment of Slaves in Different Countries: Problems in the Application of the Comparative Method," in Slavery in the New World, ed. by Laura Foner and Eugene D. Genovese (Englewood Cliffs, N. J. : Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969), p. 208.

[61]Richard Haagensen, Beskrivelse over Eylandet St. Croix i Amerika i Vest-Indien, (Copenhagen, 1758), p. 32.

[62]Hans West, Bidrag til Beskrivelse over Ste. Croix, med en kort udsigt over St. Thomas, St. Jean, Tortola, Spanish Town, og Crabeneiland (Copenhagen, 1793), pp. 69-71, p. 77.

[63]Vibaek, Dansk Vestindien, p. 140.

planters usually gave their slaves ten to twelve pots of meal from North America twice a week and some salted herring.[64] Undoubtedly, during the boom periods, plantation slaves on the Danish islands were exploited more than earlier.[65]

The tendency for slaves to suffer most during periods of rapid economic growth was a characteristic of New World slavery in general--for example, in Brazil, during the boom of the first half of the eighteenth century, planters in their rush to maximize production found it most profitable to work their slaves to death and replace them by means of the Atlantic slave trade.[66] "Whenever slaves were worked under boom conditions, as in the West Indies in the mid-eighteenth century and the Brazilian coffee plantations in the nineteenth, the institution was one of grinding attrition."[67]

The planter class in the Danish West Indies was dominated by men of English and Dutch descent, whose treatment of their slaves was unlikely to be affected by living under the Danish flag, especially since the Danish government did not attempt to protect the slaves from arbitrary and cruel treatment by their masters. A slave code promulgated in 1733 by Governor Philip Gardelin, a French

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[64]West, Bidrag til Beskrivelse over Ste. Croix, p. 72.

[65]Vibaek, Dansk Vestindien, p. 161.

[66]C.R. Boxer, The Golden Age of Brazil, 1695-1750: Growing Pains of a Colonial Society (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), pp. 7-9.

[67]David Brion Davis, "The Comparative Approach to American History: Slavery," in Slavery in the New World, ed. by Foner and Genovese, p. 67.

creole, provided for barbaric punishments, including the provision that any slave who threatened a white or swore at a white could be pinched three times with red-hot iron tongs and thereafter hanged, if the white so desired, or lose a hand. Testimony of a reputable white would suffice against any slave in court. The aim of this slave code, which was being used as a basis for punishing slaves as late as 1791, was to terrorize the slaves into obedience. Captured rebel slaves were burned alive, or had their backs broken prior to being placed on a platform to die slowly in public as a warning to others.[68]

A slave code drawn up by the Board of Trade in 1755 was never used, or even made public. The governor decided it would create too much controversy and undermine the good relationship the Danish government wished to have with the planters, for the code asserted that the slave masters had duties towards their slaves--it prescribed basic rations of food and clothing owed the slaves--and forbade slaveowners to kill a slave arbitrarily or to separate married slaves.[69]

Fears of a slave revolt were natural in view of the numerical preponderance of the slaves and the treatment to which they were subjected. On St. John development after 1718 was rapid, and by 1733 there were 109 plantations on the island, worked by

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[68]Georg Høst, Efterretninger om Øen Sanct Thomas og dens Gouverneurer, optegnede der paa Landet fra 1769 indtil 1776, (Copenhagen: Nicolaus Møller og Søn, 1791), pp. 85-88. See Appendix I.

[69]Vibaek, Dansk Vestindien, pp. 146-48.

1,087 slaves. Only 208 whites were present. The garrison consisted of eight Danish soldiers in a tiny hill-top fort, and these was no town in which whites could gather for protection. The rapid growth of the slave population on the island resulted from a relatively high percentage of recently enslaved Africans, who were normally more inclined to rebel than were slaves who had either been born in the Americas or who had lived there as slaves for a number of years.[70]

In November 1733 a major slave revolt began on St. John. Circumstances surrounding the revolt corresponded in several important ways with those present on Jamaica and thought to be main factors in the latter island's unusually numerous instances of slave revolt: 1) there was a high ratio of slaves to whites; 2) a high ratio of African-born to native-born slaves; 3) rebel leadership was provided by former warriors from militaristic African tribes; 4) absenteeism (many owners of plantations on St. John spent most of their time at Charlotte Amalia on St. Thomas) was a serious problem, weakening the ability of the whites to control their slaves; 5) food shortages or the threat of them convinced the slaves their customary rights were being violated; and 6) a mountainous terrain offered hiding places for rebel slaves and inhibited the military efforts of the whites. On both Jamaica and St. John the rebelling slaves were weakened by the deep antipathy which divided African from native-born

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[70]Bro-Jørgensen, Dansk Vestindien, pp. 222ff.

slaves.[71] Though 146 slaves joined the revolt, many others fought alongside their white masters. Only with the help of 228 French soldiers from Martinique were the last of the rebel slaves hunted down, in late May 1734, after forty-four plantations had been destroyed. Recovery was surprisingly rapid, however, and by 1739 St. John had 1,414 slaves while the number of adult white males was actually below what it had been in 1733.[72]

The racism prevalent in other West Indian slave societies was found in the Danish islands as well and served to rationalize slavery. Richard Haagensen, a Dane who was employed by the West India and Guinea Company on St. Croix in the mid-eighteenth century, wrote that the blacks were created for enslavement and worked happily in the fields, singing as they labored. "They are all evil by nature, and little that is good can be found in them; indeed, if I dare say so, I truly believe that their black skin indicates they are evil and that they are destined for slavery, so that they should not have any freedom." The slave revolt on St. John was a frightening memory, an event which demonstrated the cruelty of the slaves: it was "a horrible rebellion which cannot but be constantly in our thoughts." Harsh penalties are a necessity to deal with rebellious slaves, and "it is necessary to keep the slaves constantly at work so that they will have neither the time nor the energy to plot rebellion."[73]

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[71]Orlando Patterson, The Sociology of Slavery; An Analysis of the Origins, Development and Structure of Negro Slave Society in Jamaica. (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickenson University Press, 1967), pp. 274ff.

[72]Bro-Jørgensen, Dansk Vestindien, pp. 230-34.

[73]Haagensen, Beskrivelse over St. Croix, pp. 50-53.

Hans West, a teacher on St. Croix in the latter part of the eighteenth century, believed that the black skin of the Africans equipped them well for labor under the tropical sun; indeed, "they can be seen sleeping under the sun at midday." In addition to having a foul odor, the slaves are physically inferior to northern Europeans: "The blacks lack the strong muscles, the broad shoulders, and the appearance which demonstrates nordic strength."[74] The slaves are more fortunate than the poor in Denmark, for they need not worry about obtaining their daily bread nor about what the future will bring: "no fear about the problems of feeble old age disturbs this easily satisfied creature (denne nøisomheds søn)." West ignored the fact that slaves were allowed to starve when food was scarce and could be freed to subsist as beggars when they became too old to work. He argued that slaves actually were freer than many wealthy whites who were slaves of fashion. So content were the slaves, according to West, that they soon came to prefer life on St. Croix to life in their native Africa and did not want to return home. Yet it was important, he added, to avoid letting the slaves think their condition oppressive, for such thoughts could lead to a dangerous situation.[75]

A more sympathetic and understanding view of the slaves was held by J. C. Schmidt, a Norwegian doctor and administrator on the plantations owned by the Schimmelmann family trust (det Schimmelmannske

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[74]West, Bidrag til Beskrivelse over Ste. Croix, pp. 25-26.

[75]Ibid., pp. 84-89, p. 104.

fideikommis), Schmidt knew the language spoken by the slaves and was a careful observer. He wrote:

> They [the slaves] are far from being stupid or simple. I have overheard them many times in the evening on the plantations conducting very rational conversations and lines of argument concerning the behavior and moral character of the whites; the slaves are reserved and pretend to be very simple. They are not vengeful, . . . and they must be tyrannized for a long time before they consider rebelling.[76]

Another sympathetic eyewitness was the Moravian missionary Christian Georg Andreas Oldendorp, who lived in the Danish West Indies in 1767-68. According to him, "Unalterable necessity and coercion make the slaves pliant [gesmeidig] so that they gradually assume those slavish manners, some of which still cling to them when they have obtained their freedom."[77]

Paul Erdmann Isert, a physician and amateur botanist born in Brandenburg in 1756, lived in Danish Guinea from 1783 to 1786 and traveled to the interior of Africa, where he visited with Africans in their villages and studied the fauna and flora. Isert served as a doctor under Governor Jens Adolph Kiøge during the latter's military campaigns against rebellious tribesmen along the Volta River.[78] On October 7, 1786, Isert, returning to Europe by the only available means, sailed for St. Croix on the Danish slave

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[76] J. C. Schmidt, "Blandede Anmaerkninger, samlede paa og over Eilandet St. Kroix i Amerika," Samleren, No. 39, 1788, p. 232.

[77] Christian Georg Andreas Oldendorp, Geschichte der Mission der evangelischen Brüder auf den caraibischen Inseln S. Thomas, S. Croix und S. Jan, (2 vols; Barby: 1777) I, p. 413.

[78] Thorkild Hansen, Slavernes Øer (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1970), p. 247.

ship "Christiansborg" under Captain Jens Jensen Berg. There were 36 crewmen and 452 slaves on board. On the second day at sea there was a slave insurrection during which Isert was seriously wounded (see Appendix II). He had recovered by the time the "Christiansborg" reached St. Croix two months later and spent three months on the island, becoming a bitter opponent of the slave trade and slavery.[79]

Isert was one of the few Europeans who had seen something of the Africa that lay beyond the slave stations on the coast; he was horrified by the contrast between the free blacks he had seen in Africa and their enslaved brethren on St. Croix.

> The atrocious toil and the beatings in conjunction with a wretched diet soon combine either to kill the slave or else leave him completely deformed, he who was once so well built. Oh, what were you before? And what are you now? These sad questions I have often asked myself when observing a gang of these wretches with their driver.[80]

In sharp contrast to the portrait of the fortunate slave drawn by West, Isert wrote that the slaves were worked very hard:

> The normal treatment of these wretches in this region, especially of those engaged in field labor, is beyond all that is human. I saw--Oh! that I had never seen it!--I saw how as punishment for small, often imaginary transgressions slaves are bound to a stake in public and have their flesh slashed apart by a whip! The backs of most of them bear for life the bloody evidence of their whippings. It is not always enough merely to cut up a slave's skin, oh no, that would involve insufficient suffering; one must attempt to tickle him afterwards as well. Therefore the slave's wounds are

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[79]Paul Erdmann Isert, Reise nach Guinea und den Carabaischen Inseln in Columbien, in Briefen an seine Freunden beschreiben (Copenhagen, 1788), p. 305.

[80]Ibid., p. 336. Note: All translations, unless otherwise specified, have been made by the author.

> rubbed with Spanish pepper and salt. And what was the crime which had earned the poor culprit such deathly pain? "The dog has run away!" roars the infuriated overseer. "Put an iron collar with a pair of prongs on him so that one can recognize him."
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> . . . . . .
>
> I once saw on a slave woman a singular device for weaning a slave away from rum drinking, which in the slave's misery is the only pleasure he knows. She had over her entire head a thin, metal mask, which was closed under her throat with a lock. There were openings for the eyes and small openings for the nose to let in air, but the slave woman could not without permission, that is, without having the mask unlocked, eat or drink anything at all. She was constantly to wear this muzzle, day and night.[81] Oh, that this invention never reaches northern Europe! for if it should, I fear all the houses would swarm with such masked persons. Of course the north Europeans would also wear these ornaments with greater dignity than do the unhappy slaves![82]

Isert wrote that the slaves had to work from before sunrise until after sunset. The bombas (black slave-drivers) were always present and were quick to use their whips.

> A black slave has absolutely no rights. For no reason at all he can be clubbed half to death by a white to whom he is of no concern, and he may not hinder the white in the least. If the slave were even to raise his hand against the white, he would incontestably forfeit his life. In fact, such a strict code of justice is necessary in order that the slaves be unable to obtain time to hit upon the natural idea of rebelling--various horrible examples of which one already has in the Americas--but on the contrary be kept constantly sweating under the yoke of tyranny.
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> But, say the defenders of slavery, the blacks are obstinate, rotten people, addicted to thievery, to riotous behavior and all

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[81]This was a common way of punishing slaves in Brazil, where the physical treatment of slaves was probably as harsh as in the West Indian sugar islands. But placing metal masks on slaves was apparently unknown in the United States. See Carl N. Degler, Neither White Nor Black; Slavery and Race Relations in Brazil and the United States (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1971), p. 70.

[82]Isert, Reise nach Guinea und den Carabaischen Inseln, pp. 332-35.

> the vices which arise out here. And have we not here on St. Croix slaves who, if they were asked whether they would like to return to their fatherland, would answer no? To these defenders of slavery I want nothing more than to answer that if they want to be converted from their beliefs, they can take the trouble to travel to the interior of Africa, to see whether they will not find everywhere there signs of innocence and the most honest people imaginable. Major vices, such as murder and thievery, are almost unknown. These agents of Belial rule only in places where the lure of European products has reached thus far. Ach! I fear the greater part of Africa will soon be tainted. It is possible that a slave who is used here on St. Croix as a chamber servant would have no desire to return again to his fatherland, for things are tolerable for him here and he is uncertain whether, once back in Africa, he would not be sold again to European slavers, in which case he perhaps would not receive as good a job as he now has. But ask the legions of field slaves what they would answer, if they knew beforehand that one was serious and really wanted to return them to Africa. Yet what good does it do that I join my complaints about this most unnatural and unjust traffic with the groans of brave philosophers about the great irresolvable burden of the Europeans, to have partly wiped out or ruined two entire continents of people![83]

West, whose views on West Indian slavery were different from Isert's, criticized Isert for making exaggerated judgments based on insufficient experience in the West Indies and said Isert's writing "gives evidence of haste."[84] West showed pettiness by adding that Isert erred in writing that carrots are grown on St. Thomas, when in fact everyone knows they are imported from North America. "Thus one learns anew, how easy it is to make a mistake, when one describes the nature of a region from preconceived views (af et daekket Bord)."[85]

Rapid growth of the slave population on St. Croix after the island's acquisition by the Danish company in 1733 led to fears of

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[83] Ibid., pp. 336-38.

[84] West, Bidrag til Beskrivelse over Ste. Croix, p. 96.

[85] Ibid., p. 333.

a revolt there; nevertheless, the garrison remained small: in 1749 it consisted of only fourteen soldiers, who were seldom in condition to fight due to their taste for "kill devil," the fresh rum produced in the West Indies. The percentage of whites in the population of St. Croix declined steadily as the number of slaves rose; in 1755 whites comprised 13 per cent, in 1775 8 per cent, and in 1803 slightly more than 6 per cent of the population.[86] A plot to initiate a slave rising at Christmas, 1759, was uncovered a few weeks in advance; the suspected leader was the exiled son of a slave executed on Antigua in 1736 for plotting a revolt, and was described as intelligent and able to read and write.[87]

Attempts to deal with the problem of runaway slaves were largely unsuccessful. There was a steady flow of runaways from the Danish West Indies to Puerto Rico, some forty miles west of St. Thomas. By 1745 an estimated 300 slaves had escaped from the Danish islands to Puerto Rico.[88] Once in Puerto Rico a slave could easily hide in the mountains, or else could obtain freedom by working a year for the government and becoming a Catholic. "Throughout the eighteenth century Puerto Rico followed the practice of giving asylum to fugitive slaves from non-Spanish islands, with very little variation from the principle that, once they had embraced the Roman

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[86]Green-Pedersen, "The Scope . . . of the Danish . . . Slave Trade," p. 150.

[87]Vibaek, Dansk Vestindien, p. 156.

[88]Bro-Jørgensen, Dansk Vestindien, p. 224.

Catholic religion, they were not to be returned."[89] In 1767 the governor of the Danish islands signed an agreement with his counterpart on Puerto Rico calling for mutual return of runaways, but the measure was not enforced.[90]

Runaways could also hide in the mountains in the northwestern part of St. Croix. Forty-eight free colored were recruited from St. Thomas to hunt runaway slaves on St. Croix at mid-century, but the runaways were in close touch with the plantation slaves and were usually able to avoid capture.[91]

Though there were no laws in the Danish West Indies restricting the power of the masters over their slaves and no legal rights for slaves, they did enjoy certain de facto rights. There was general recognition, for instance, of the right of a slave to marry as he pleased, to own property acquired by selling produce raised on the small garden plots set aside for slaves to grow food, and to purchase his freedom.[92]

Manumission, accomplished when a slave purchased his freedom or was freed by his master, often in the latter's will, was sufficiently common to have created by the late eighteenth century a growing population of free colored in the towns; in Christiansted

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[89]Elsa Goveia, "The West Indian Slave Laws in the Eighteenth Century," in Slavery in the New World, ed. by Foner and Genovese, p. 116.

[90]Høst, Efterretninger om Øen Sanct Thomas, p. 159.

[91]Bro-Jørgensen, Dansk Vestindien, p. 275.

[92]Vibaek, Dansk Vestindien, p. 146.

on St. Croix there were approximately 800 free colored in 1790 out of a total population of about 4,800.[93] Though they were free, they were not held in esteem by the whites; an ordinance of 1747 had attempted to keep the free colored in a segregated part of Christiansted.[94] West thought "their freedom is unfortunate for themselves and for the society in which they live."[95] Yet some of them occupied significant positions in the local economy. For instance, nearly all of the sailors who manned the sloops and schooners engaged in the inter-island trade were free colored; some of them rose to become captains.[96]

White hostility towards the free colored could be intense, however, as shown by an unsigned, undated letter, written in Danish interspersed with French, English, and Latin by a town bailiff on St. Croix and sent to a committee which in 1792 was assigned the task of drawing up a new slave code for the Danish West Indies. The

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[93]West, Bidrag til Beskrivelse over Ste. Croix, p. 58.

[94]Bro-Jørgensen, Dansk Vestindien, p. 257.

[95]West, Bidrag til Beskrivelse over Ste. Croix, p. 59.

[96]Johan Peter Nissen, Reminiscenses of a 46 Years' Residence in the Island of St. Thomas in the West Indies (Nazareth, Pa.: Senseman and Co., 1838), p. 58. A mulatto captain named Iserum won fame for his skills as a navigator, though he had never received any training: he once supposedly sailed straight to Trinidad after having been told only that the island lay somewhere south of Grenada, where he had been before. Høst provides a list of free colored on St. Thomas in 1772, at which time most were employed as carpenters, tailors, construction workers, fishermen, sailors, and shoemakers; two were planters. See Høst, Efterretninger om Øen Sanct Thomas, p. 170.

writer argued that slavery was not so much an economic as a social necessity; it was better for everyone that blacks were enslaved, and manumission should be outlawed: "It ought to be totally forbidden for a white under any circumstances to free a slave and especially a female slave without suffering the maximum capital loss," for the free-colored are a "corrupt, pernicious race of vipers that at the very least ought to be reduced in numbers if not extirpated (au moins être Diminuée sinon extirpée)." The Danish government should take note of what happened when the French National Assembly attempted to ignore "the natural difference between blacks and whites" by granting equality to the free colored on St. Domingue, an event which had disastrous consequences.[97]

Isert, describing a gruesome torture inflicted by a free colored-woman on her female house slave, said the free colored were even more barbaric than the whites in their treatment of slaves. He referred to the free colored sarcastically as "that glorious breed, the free mulattoes! (die herliche Brut, die Freymulatten!) or the cross (Mitteldinge) between Europeans and Negroes."[98]

Until 1732 there was no systematic attempt to convert the slaves in the Danish West Indies to Christianity. In that year Count Zinzendorf, leader of the Church of the United Brethren, or

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[97]Danish State Archives, Copenhagen, Vestindisk-guineisk Rente samt Generaltoldkammer, Om Negerhandelens Afskaffelse. Anonymous letter from St. Croix to the committee established in 1792 to draw up a new slave code for the Danish West Indies.

[98]Isert, Reise nach Guinea und den Carabaischen Inseln, p. 333.

Moravians, launched a mission to convert the slaves in the Danish islands. Zinzendorf had been introduced to a Negro slave living in Copenhagen and, inspired by the slave's tale of how much his fellows in the West Indies would appreciate an opportunity to become Christians, decided to turn the evangelistic fervor of the Moravians towards the goal of converting the slaves in the Danish West Indies.[99]

The Moravians gradually overcame the suspicions of the planters and won general support for their mission--the planters came to realize that the purely religious teaching of the missionaries posed no threat to them; indeed, Christian slaves proved more obedient and trustworthy than their pagan fellows.[100] By the end of the eighteenth century there were two mission stations on each of the three inhabited Danish islands, with the Moravians using slave labor to operate their own plantations in order to cover their expenses. So accepted had the Moravians become that one of their creole converts became governor of the Danish West Indies in 1796.[101] Wherever the missionaries established themselves in the West Indies in the eighteenth century, they concentrated on religious instruction of

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[99]H. Lawaetz, Brødremenighedens Mission: Dansk-Vestindien, 1769-1848 (Copenhagen: J. Cohens Bogtryckkerier, 1902), pp. 20ff.

[100]Oldendorp, Geschichte der Mission der evangelischen Brüder, p. 5 of preface; I. K. Hegner, Fortsaettelse af David Cranzes Brødres Historie (Copenhagen, 1792), p. 97. Count Zinzendorf, on a visit to St. Thomas, argued that enslavement of Africans was divinely sanctioned and cited the Bible to illustrate his view. See J. E. Hutton, A History of Moravian Missions (London: Moravian Publication Office, 1922), p. 44.

[101]Vibaek, Dansk Vestindien, pp. 209ff.

the slaves and saw no alternative but to accept the existing social order.[102]

The mission of the Danish Lutheran Church, which lasted from 1755 to 1799, accomplished little other than to publish some religious literature in the language of the slaves, creole Dutch (hollandske kreolsk or bastardhollandsk), which was a simplified Dutch with some African elements, used by the slaves to communicate among themselves and with their masters. The language originated on St. Thomas around 1700 and was largely replaced by English by about the turn of the next century. During the nineteenth century it gradually disappeared.[103]

Though relatively small and weak, Denmark, by virtue of its possession of colonies in Africa and the West Indies, was able to join with the larger European colonial powers in profiting from the South Atlantic System, "a complex economic organism centered on the production in the Americas of tropical staples for consumption in Europe, and grown by the labor of Africans."[104] During the period of company rule, sugar and cotton remained the chief exports of the Danish West Indies. These products were purchased from the planters

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[102]Elsa Goveia, Slave Society in the British Leeward Islands at the End of the Eighteenth Century (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), pp. 272ff. The Moravians also established highly successful missions in the British Leeward Islands at Antigua (1756) and St. Kitts (1774).

[103]Vibaek, Dansk Vestindien, pp. 195ff.

[104]Philip D. Curtin, The Atlantic Slave Trade; A Census (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), p. 3.

by the company factor and sold in Copenhagen. In keeping with the dominant economic ideas of the time, no sugar refining was permitted in the islands, that task being reserved for Denmark, where the company's sugar refinery enjoyed a very strong position.[105]

In the years after 1754 sugar refining became the most important industrial activity in Copenhagen. In 1770 there were twelve refineries there, producing sugar and syrup worth 760,000 rigsdaler.[106] There were eleven refineries in other parts of the monarchy.[107]

Denmark supplied the islands primarily with luxury goods, food, tools, and equipment for sugar production; the Gold Coast exported slaves to the islands; North America sent timber and food; Spanish America, agricultural animals and building equipment.[108] After the government took over the islands in 1754, it sought to use the West Indies as sources of raw materials for Danish industry and to reserve them as a market for Danish products.[109]

The wars of the second half of the eighteenth century proved highly beneficial to Danish foreign trade and shipping, as Danish merchants took advantage of their country's neutral status to supply

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[105]Sveistrup, De Dansk-Vestindiske Øers økonomiske Historie, pp. 91-92.

[106]Vibaek, Dansk Vestindien, p. 73.

[107]Sveistrup and Willerslev, Den danske Sukkerhandel, p. 75.

[108]Sveistrup, De Dansk-Vestindiske Øers økonomiske Historie, p. 97.

[109]Sveistrup and Willerslev, Den danske Sukkerhandel, p. 60.

the West Indian colonies of the warring powers, in particular the French and, to a lesser extent, the Dutch islands.[110] The man who laid the foundations for this so-called golden age of Danish commerce was Johan Hartvig Ernst Bernstorff, foreign minister in the reign of Frederik V; Bernstorff stressed the importance of overseas trade combined with a policy of neutrality.[111] During the Seven Years' War the number of ships sailing from Copenhagen to the West Indies increased rapidly from a yearly average of 4.2 in the period 1751-55 to 13.5 from 1756-60, and reached 23.2 from 1761-65.[112] During the War of the American Revolution Danish foreign trade again experienced a major boom: in 1780, 90 Danish ships sailed to the West Indies; in 1781, 135; and in 1782, 226. Copenhagen was the most important port in the Danish monarchy--in 1780, 70 per cent of the ships bound for the West Indies sailed from it, and in 1782, 50 per cent.[113] Imports from the West Indies into Copenhagen in 1782-83 reached 4,498,259 rigsdaler, surpassing those from Europe (2,323,290) for the first time.[114]

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[110]Jens Vibaek, Reform og Fallit 1784-1830, Vol. X of Danmarks Historie, ed. by John Danstrup and Hal Koch (14 vols.; Copenhagen: Politikens Forlag, 1964), p. 161.

[111]Marius Vibaek, Den danske Handels Historie (Copenhagen: Nordisk Forlag, 1932), p. 223.

[112]Sveistrup, De dansk Vestindiske Øers økonomiske Historie, p. 93.

[113]Ole Feldbaek, Dansk Neutralitetspolitik under Krigen 1778-1783 (Copenhagen: G. E. C. Gads Forlag, 1971), p. 191.

[114]Sveistrup and Willerslev, Den danske Sukkerhandel, p. 50. Imports from Asia remained far greater than from either of the former.

As the only Baltic state with significant tropical colonies, Denmark enjoyed a great advantage over her neighbors.[115] Sugar from the Danish West Indies was available in such quantity that it became an important part of Denmark's exports to the Baltic area, as well as supplying all of Denmark's needs. In 1778, exports of syrup, refined sugar, and muscavado (brown sugar, from the Portuguese menos, less, and acabado, finished[116]) amounted to 65.7 per cent of total exports from Copenhagen; in 1784, the figure was 50.3 per cent. The most important Baltic markets for Danish sugar were Prussia, Sweden, and Russia. In 1778 and 1784, sugar products accounted for 68.4 and 45.8 per cent of total exports from Copenhagen to Prussia; 50.4 and 63.8 per cent of total exports from Copenhagen to Sweden; and 20.2 and 58.4 per cent of total exports from Copenhagen to Russia. Among industrial exports from Copenhagen in 1778 and 1784, refined sugar and syrup accounted for between 80 and 90 per cent of the total. Export of sugar, including muscavado, was of overwhelming importance for Denmark's balance of trade.[117]

Sugar made the Danish West Indies an important source of wealth for Denmark, and it was reasonable to assume that the govern-

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[115]Sweden acquired the tiny island of St. Bartholomew from France in 1784, but with its small population of 950, over half of whom were white, and a size of only eight square miles, St. Bartholomew never became more than a small trading station. See Sten Carlsson, Svensk historia (2d. ed.; Stockholm: Svenska Bokförlaget/Bonniers, 1964), II, 222-23.

[116]Noel Deerr, The History of Sugar (2 vols.; London: Chapman and Hall Ltd., 1949), I, 109.

[117]Sveistrup and Willerslev, Den danske Sukkerhandel, pp. 122-26.

ment would continue to encourage the production of raw sugar in the islands. In 1784 the Danish islands were thriving colonies, but they were dependent on the labor of Negro slaves, who were so exploited and mistreated that their numbers could be maintained only by means of the slave trade. There was no indication that in just eight years the Danish government would condemn the slave trade and set a deadline for ending it.

CHAPTER II

Ernst Schimmelmann and the Prelude to Abolition

The decision to abolish the Danish slave trade was facilitated by the oligarchic nature of Danish absolutism in the late eighteenth century and by the presence within the ruling elite in the period after 1784 of men who favored a broad range of reforms. The men in power after 1784 inaugurated an era of reform which has been called "perhaps the happiest period" in Danish history.[1]

King Christian VII (1766-1808) was mentally ill during all but the very first years of his reign. This circumstance enabled first Johan Friedrich Struensee, from 1770 to 1772, and thereafter the king's stepmother, Juliana Maria, second wife of Frederik V, to rule Denmark through the King, who merely signed documents placed before him.[2] For twelve years following the overthrow of Struensee, Juliana Maria and her favorite, Ove Høegh-Guldberg, a doctrinnaire conservative, ruled Denmark. This so-called Guldberg regime revoked most of the reforms inaugurated by Struensee,

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[1]Vibaek, Reform og Fallit, 1784-1830, Vol. X of Danmarks Historie, p. 35.

[2]Svend Cedergren Bech, Oplysning og Tolerance, 1721-1784, Vol. IX of Danmarks Historie, ed. by John Danstrup and Hal Koch (14 vols.; Copenhagen: Politikens Forlag, 1965), pp. 408ff.

including freedom of the press. It also ended recent moves toward improving the position of the peasants, and in general represented an attitude hostile to the ideas of reform which Struensee had sought to apply to Danish society.[3]

The young Crown Prince, Frederik, son of Christian VII, was sixteen in 1784. Outraged at the insults he had suffered at the hands of the ruling clique, Frederik gave his support to organizing a conspiracy to overthrow the Guldberg regime; prominent among the conspirators was the nephew of J. H. E. Bernstorff, Count Andreas Peter Bernstorff, who had been removed from his position as foreign minister by Guldberg a few years before. On April 14, 1784, the Crown Prince, at a meeting of the Council of State (Statsraadet), got the king to sign a document ordering an end to the Guldberg regime.[4] Thenceforth every royal order was to be signed by both the King and the Crown Prince. By weakening the power of the King, this measure actually violated the King's Law (Kongeloven) of 1665, which was the legal basis for Danish absolutism, and which had no provision for removing a king in case of insanity.[5]

The new regime sought to modernize Danish society and apply to Denmark some of the social and economic ideas of the enlightenment.

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[3] Ibid., pp. 492ff.

[4] Vibaek, Reform og Fallit, pp. 21ff.

[5] Edvard Holm, Danmark-Norges Historie fra den store nordiske Krigs slutning til Rigernes Adskillelse, 1720-1814 (7 vols.; Copenhagen: G. E. C. Gad, 1896-1909). Vol. VI, Part I: Styrelse og Reformer, 1784-1791, pp. 1-2.

A small group of reform-minded ministers actually governed the country with the consent of Crown Prince Frederik until Bernstorff's death in 1797, after which the Crown Prince increasingly took power into his own hands.[6] The leading ministers were well-educated, cosmopolitan men who opposed arbitrary governmental interference in the lives of the people; they were certainly not modern democrats and favored a tolerant, aristocratic rule. For them the ideal type of government was that of England.[7]

Denmark had been a strongly centralized state since 1661, under the rule of an absolute monarch. In its efforts to achieve reform the Danish central government, unlike the governments of other monarchies such as France and Austria, did not have to contend with dangerous opposition from powerful privileged bodies such as parlements and provincial assemblies; the Danish nobility posed no threat to the monarchy.[8] Yet the government, when devising important laws affecting Danish society, did have to consider the views of the public. The days when, as under the early absolute monarchy, the government could pretend to ignore public sentiment were past.[9]

Freedom of the press was once again in effect after 1786,

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[6]Aage Friis, Axel Linvald, and M. Mackeprang, ed., Schultz Danmarkshistorie; vort folks Historie gennem Tiderne (6 vols.; Copenhagen: J. H. Schultz Forlag, 1941-43), Vol. IV, Part I, Oplysningens Tidsalder, by Axel Linvald, p. 10.

[7]Vibaek, Reform og Fallit, pp. 35-36.

[8]Linvald, Schultz Danmarks Historie, IV, Part 1, p. 10.

[9]Holm, Danmark-Norges Historie, VI, Part 1, p. 85.

when the police were forbidden to interfere with the journals. Between 1770, when press freedom was first permitted under Struensee, and 1800, 116 new journals were started.[10] Younger reformers such as Count Ernst Schimmelmann (1747-1831) and Count Christian Ditlev Reventlow wanted to use the press to enlist public support for their views in their struggle with conservatives in the government. They could hope to obtain the backing of the public because support for reform was widespread in Copenhagen in the years after 1784.[11]

The three leading ministers were Bernstorff, Reventlow, and Schimmelmann. Each was born to great wealth and educated for a career in government, and they were closely connected by friendshp and marriage. Although there was resentment at their German background, they were patriots with a genuine desire to serve Denmark.[12] Bernstorff was foreign minister and the dominant figure in the Council of State, where final decisions were made on the recommendations of the departments; that Bernstorff was held in awe by Crown Prince Frederik was an important reason for the power which he, along with Reventlow and Schimmelmann, was able to exercise.[13] Reventlow was head of the Treasury Department (Rentekammeret) and a member of the Board of Trade; he is best known as the architect of the great

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[10]Vibaek, Reform og Fallit, pp. 186-87.

[11]Holm, Danmark-Norges Historie, VI, Part 1, pp. 42-43, 88.

[12]Vibaek, Reform og Fallit, pp. 34ff.

[13]Holm, Danmark-Norges Historie, VI, Part I, p. 4.

agricultural reforms which included the decree of 1788 liberating peasants from the Stavnsbaand.[14] Schimmelmann held the title of Finance Minister and was head of the Board of Trade and of the Board of Finance; he was primarily responsible for the decree of 1792 on the abolition of the slave trade.

It was Schimmelmann and Christian Ditlev Reventlow "who took the initiative in by far the greatest number of governmental decisions concerning Denmark's internal development and conditions which characterized the last sixteen years of the eighteenth century."[15] Schimmelmann's reformist inclinations can be seen from a letter he wrote to Reventlow on June 28, 1788, eight days after the decree abolishing the Stavnsbaand had been issued:

> How I hope, dear Reventlow, that your desires may be fulfilled for both of us, that we may exert all of our strength in order to advance the good cause. Still there is much left to do; our efforts must be devoted both to getting men who share our goals to join with us, and to promoting the spread of that spirit which guides us, so that it can become ever more common. Only then can we hope to see great and swift results.[16]

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[14]The Stavnsbaand had been initiated in 1733; it forced male peasants from childhood to middle age to remain on the estate where they had been raised. The official reasoning behind the Stavnsbaand was the need to guarantee that each district could supply a sufficient number of soldiers; in fact the Stavnsbaand became a means of insuring that the estate owners had a large enough labor supply. A gradual abolition of the Stavnsbaand was decreed on June 20, 1788; freed instantly were male peasants under 14 and over 36 years of age. For those in between, the Stavnsbaand was to continue in effect for another twelve years.

[15]Holm, Danmark-Norges Historie, VI, Part I, p. 46.

[16]Louis Bobé, Efterladte papirer fra den Reventlowske Familiekreds i Tidsrummet 1770-1827 (10 vols.; Copenhagen: Lehm & Stage, 1895-1931), IV, 31-32.

Bernstorff served as the great spokesman in the Council of State for the reforms Reventlow and Schimmelmann sought. Without Bernstorff's assistance the latter two could never have overcome the opposition of conservative members of the government, for they depended on Bernstorff's ability to influence the young Crown Prince.[17]

Schimmelmann, born in Dresden, had moved to Denmark with his father, Heinrich Carl Schimmelmann, when the latter's success as a merchant in Hamburg brought him to the attention of the Danish government in 1761. At that time the elder Schimmelmann's wealth was estimated at 1,250,000 rigsdaler.[18]

Danish finances were in a deplorable condition, and it was believed that a man of Schimmelmann's ability and reputation could obtain favorable loans abroad for the state. He was placed in charge of the effort to reduce the debt. To accomplish this task he resorted to the sale of Crown property.[19] Exploiting his position for his own personal gain, the elder Schimmelmann in 1763 purchased the four plantations in the West Indies and the sugar refinery in Copenhagen which the Crown had taken over from the West India and Guinea Company in 1755. For them he paid, in eight annual, interest-free installments, 400,000 rigsdaler, a low price for such

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[17]Holm, Danmark-Norges Historie, VI, Part I, p. 47.

[18]J. O. Bro-Jørgensen, Heinrich Carl Schimmelmann: en Studie i Skatmesterens Fortid (Copenhagen: Fremad, 1970), p. 197.

[19]Bech, Oplysning og Tolerance, Vol. IX in Danmarks Historie, pp. 399-400.

valuable properties. The plantations and sugar refinery became an important part of the Schimmelmann family holdings.[20]

Ernst Schimmelmann, who was well-educated and trilingual, rose rapidly in the Danish government under the patronage of his father. Made a member of the Board of Trade in 1773, he became head of that department and a member of the Board of Finance three years later. Following the overthrow of the Guldberg Regime in 1784, he became head of the Board of Finance and received the title of Finance Minister. In 1788 he obtained a seat in the Council of State, where he was an ally of Bernstorff and a proponent of reform.[21]

Schimmelmann's first wife died five years after they were married. In 1782 he married Charlotte Schubart, an intelligent, well-educated woman, sister of the wife of Ludwig Reventlow, who was the brother of Christian Ditlev Reventlow and himself an important figure in Danish government after 1784.[22]

Countess Charlotte Schimmelmann became the leading hostess in the social world of the intellectual and governmental elite in Copenhagen. At her salon poets, diplomats, intellectuals, and prominent figures in the government discussed philosophy and politics in an atmosphere receptive to the latest ideas and fashions. So many foreigners were present at these salons that a guest could get the

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[20]Vibaek, Dansk Vestindien, p. 8.

[21]C. F. Bricka, ed., Dansk Biografisk Lexikon, tillige omfattende Norge for Tidsrummet 1537-1814 (20 vols.; Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1887-1906), XV, 132-133.

[22]Vibaek, Reform og Fallit, pp. 53-54.

impression of being in Germany or France rather than in Denmark.[23]

The elder Schimmelmann died in 1782, leaving an inheritance of three million rigsdaler.[24] The plantations, sugar refineries, and an arms factory were placed under a trust (fideikommis) in which Ernst Schimmelmann was the main partner. The most valuable properties of the Schimmelmann family were the plantations on St. Croix, which in 1779 were valued at 850,000 rigsdaler, and two sugar refineries in Copenhagen then valued at 145,000 rigsdaler.[25]

The Schimmelmann plantations and sugar refineries were very profitable enterprises. Much of the sugar from the refineries was sold in Norway: in 1793, when total sugar sales of the Schimmelmann refineries amounted to 334,000 rigsdaler, 240,000 were from sales in Norway. Profits that year from the sugar refineries totaled 62,552

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[23]Holm, Danmark-Norges Historie, VI, Part 2, Forskjellige Samfundsforhold og indre Tilstande, 1784-1799. p. 373. Schimmelmann gave financial support to many Danish and foreign intellectuals, such as the Danish poets Jens Baggesen and Adam Oehlenschlaeger, and the German writer Johann Friedrich von Schiller. Schimmelmann and the Duke of Augustenborg wrote to Schiller: "Accept this offer, noble man! Do not let our titles lead you to decline it. We know no other sign of greatness than to be human beings, citizens of the great republic whose borders include more than the life of one generation, more than this planet. We are only human beings, your brothers, not vain men of high rank." Cited in Vibaek, Reform og Fallit, p. 55.

[24]Vibaek, Reform og Fallit, p. 50. Danish rigsdaler prior to 1813 were valued at 390 to 375 English grains fine silver, which was somewhat greater, for instance, than the value of the German Convention thaler in the second half of the eighteenth century. See Alexander Del Mar, A History of the Monetary Systems of France and Other European States (New York: The Cambridge Encyclopedia Co., 1903), pp. 301, 352-53, 358-59.

[25]Sveistrup and Willerslev, Den danske Sukkerhandel, p. 114.

rigsdaler; from the sugar plantations, 171,132.[26] The number of slaves on Schimmelmann's St. Croix plantations remained fairly constant from 1773 to 1782 at about 960.[27]

The Schimmelmann estate also included an armaments factory at Hellebaek, landed estates in Jutland and on Zealand, and a palatial home in Copenhagen. After his father's death Ernst Schimmelmann purchased a copper-works, an industrial establishment in Jutland which produced bricks, earthenware, and soap, and half-ownership in a paper mill.[28]

Schimmelmann was also deeply involved in overseas trading ventures as a director of major trading companies in which he had large investments. During the War of the American Revolution, when Danish West Indian trade expanded rapidly by taking advantage of Danish neutrality and the temporary inability of Britain to enforce the Rule of 1756, the government supported the creation of chartered trading companies which were largely controlled by and heavily dependent on the Crown.[29] The largest of these companies was the

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[26]Danish State Archives, Copenhagen. Ernst Schimmelmanns Privat Arkiv, Pk. 72, Fideikommisset vedkommende Papirer 1782-1800, Vortrag zur Generalversammlung, May 1794, p. 4.

[27]Danish State Archives, Copenhagen. Vestindisk-guineisk Rente samt Generaltoldkammer, Dokumenter vedkommende Kommissionen til Negerhandelens bedre Indretning og Ophaevelse samt Efterretninger om Negerhandelen i Vestindien , Tabelle über die Neger auf den zum Gräflich v. Schimmelmannschen Familien Fideicommis gehörenden Plantagen auf St. Croix.

[28]Vibaek, Reform og Fallit, pp. 51-52.

[29]Feldbaek, Dansk Neutralitetspolitik, pp. 53ff.

Royal West India Company (Kongeligt Vestindisk Handelsselskab) created in 1778. Of the six directors of the company, five were members of the government, including both Heinrich Carl Schimmelmann and Ernst Schimmelmann; the latter became chairman of the board (første direktør) and invested 20,000 rigsdaler in the company. The company's requests for assistance from the government were usually sympathetically received.[30]

The West India Company was granted the right to customs duties and anchorage and weighing fees on St. Thomas and St. John in return for a yearly payment of 16,000 rigsdaler. Most important, however, the company was to receive the income from import duties and excise taxes on coffee imported into the Danish monarchy in return for an annual payment of 20,000 rigsdaler. The Crown also favored the company by granting it interest-free loans and free use of a warehouse on St. Thomas, and by promoting sales of company stock. Unlike the former West India and Guinea Company, it had no monopoly on the trade with the West Indies; nor did the shareholders have any say in the policies of the company or in the selection of its directors.[31]

Schimmelmann was also chairman of the board of the Baltic-Guinea Company (Østersøisk-Guineiske Handelsselskab), established in 1781. This company represented an attempt to connect

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[30]P. P. Sveistrup, "Det Kongelige Danske oktroyerede Vestindiske Handelsselskab, 1778-85; en driftsøkonomisk Undersøgelse," Historisk Tidsskrift, 10th series, VI (1942-44), 389ff.

[31]Ibid., pp. 387-88.

the Baltic trade with the African trade; it received a monopoly on trade with the Gold Coast, which meant it was to be heavily involved in the slave trade. To help the company maintain the forts on the Gold Coast, the Crown gave the company a yearly sum of 25,000 rigsdaler. The company also benefited from export premiums on Danish goods traded on the Gold Coast in exchange for slaves, gold, and ivory. The board of directors was selected by the Crown from the ranks of the government bureaucracy, and shareholders were without influence on company policy. The Crown gave the Baltic-Guinea Company thirty-seven ships formerly used in the Greenland and Guinea trade, as well as warehouses and a shipyard in Copenhagen.[32]

In 1783, with the end of the War of the American Revolution, the circumstances which had helped create a boom in Danish overseas commerce ended. The harbor at St. Thomas, which after the English attack on St. Eustatius in 1781 had been the most important entrepôt in the West Indies, often containing between three and four hundred ships, in the spring of 1785 was visited by only five ships. Income from customs duties in Copenhagen fell from 731,689 rigsdaler in 1783 to 490,505 in 1787. Exports from Copenhagen fell from 1,503,032 rigsdaler in 1784 to 1,064,057 in 1785, and to 609,937 rigsdaler in 1790.[33]

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[32]Knud Klem, "Det kgl. oktr. Østersøisk-Guineiske Handelsselskab," Handels-og Søfartsmuseets Aarbøger. 1970, p. 16, 18, 12. Among the ships that were to be used in the slave trade was the "Baron Ernst von Schimmelmann."

[33]Holm, Danmark-Norges Historie, VI, Part I, p. 166.

The great Danish overseas trading companies created during the war were doomed with the return of peace. The profitable trade with the French West Indies ended in February 1783 when France banned trade by foreign vessels with the French colonies. Other countries soon restored pre-war trade restrictions, thereby dealing a fatal blow to both the Danish West India Company and the Baltic-Guinea Company.[34] The Crown had been primarily responsible for the creation of these companies and had induced several thousand families to invest in them; it was now urged by the Board of Trade to do everything in its power to help the companies overcome their difficulties.[35]

In 1785 the directors of the West India Company asked the Crown to buy up the company's stock at 300 rigsdaler per share, three times the original price, and said the government could operate the company at a profit, something the directors had given up all hope of doing themselves. The Board of Trade and the Board of Finance agreed to pay the shareholders 260 rigsdaler per share, despite the admitted fact that the shares then had a market value of only 60 rigsdaler each. The Crown's generosity was probably due to Schimmelmann's position as a major shareholder and chairman of the board; as head of the Board of Trade and the Board of Finance, he was in a position to reward himself with state funds. Schimmelmann was not so self-denying as to refuse to

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[34]Sveistrup, "Det Vestindiske Handelsselskab," p. 412.

[35]Holm, Danmark-Norges Historie, VI, Part I, p. 153.

make money at the expense of the state and the taxpayers. From the sale of his stock in the company at 260 rigsdaler, his remuneration as chairman of the board, and the dividends he earned on his stock during the boom, Schimmelmann enriched himself by 50,000 rigsdaler more than he could have earned by investing his money in a bank at normal interest. Other government officials profited, too, though not as much as Schimmelmann.[36]

The Baltic-Guinea Company also had problems when the war ended. In an attempt to improve the company's situation, the Crown in 1786 cancelled 1,150,000 rigsdaler of the comapny's debt to the state, and gave the company 400,000 rigsdaler.[37] Still the company's prospects were poor.

Schimmelmann, seeking a solution to the problems of the Baltic-Guinea Company, in 1786 sent D. G. Moldenhawer, a professor of theology at the University of Copenhagen, on a secret mission to Spain with the primary goal of obtaining for the Danish company the right to sell slaves in the Spanish American colonies. Moldenhawer was also to attempt to trade some of the Danish African forts for Spanish recognition of Denmark's right to occupy the uninhabited but

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[36]Sveistrup, "Det Vestindiske Handelsselskab," pp. 422ff. Ernst Schimmelmann lacked his father's all-consuming interest in business and has often been viewed as a poor businessman. See Axel Linvald, Kronprins Frederik og hans Regering, 1797-1807 (Copenhagen: G. E. C. Gads Forlag, 1923), p. 349. It would seem more accurate to regard him as a man highly adept at making money, not least by using his position in the government to promote his own financial well-being.

[37]Klem, "Det Østersøisk-Guineiske Handelsselskab," p. 41.

fertile Crab Island off the coast of Puerto Rico.[38] Nothing came of Moldenhawer's negotiations with Count Floridablanca, however; Spain could purchase slaves cheaper from the English and did not want to abandon its claim to Crab Island.[39]

Schimmelmann finally arranged to have the greatest merchant in Denmark, Frederic de Coninck, take over the trade of the Baltic-Guinea Company; de Coninck believed he could make a profit where the company could not. Accordingly, the government bought up the stock of the Baltic-Guinea Company at seventy rigsdaler per share, well below the original price of 100 but nearly twice the current value.[40] The government then signed a contract with de Coninck, granting him the former company's possessions and a monopoly on trade with Danish Guinea, in return for his payment of a sum well under that which the government itself had paid for the shares of the Baltic-Guinea Company; all together the government lost more than two million rigsdaler on the Baltic-Guinea Company.[41] Schimmelmann secretly acquired 24,000 rigsdaler worth of stock in de Coninck's new slave-trading venture. Schimmelmann probably received this stock

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[38] E. Gigas, "En theologisk Professors diplomatiske Mission," Historisk Tidsskrift, 8th series, I (1907-08), 185ff.

[39] Ibid., p. 227.

[40] Klem, "Det Østersøisk-Guineiske Handelsselskab," p. 44 and p. 48.

[41] Holm, Danmark-Norges Historie, VI, Part I, pp. 156-57. The contract said that de Coninck would continue the Guinea trade for twenty-eight years, with the regulations governing the trade under the Baltic-Guinea Company to continue at least for the time being.

as a gift from de Coninck in appreciation for assistance to de Coninck in completing the transaction.[42]

The Danish government had been concerned not only by the poor performance of the Baltic-Guinea Company but by the tendency of the slave population on St. Croix to decline. Between 1780 and 1790 the number of slaves on St. Croix fell from 22,687 to 22,119.[43] The number of slaves sold was not sufficient to maintain the slave population.

From 1778 to 1789 the overwhelming majority of slaves transported by Danish slavers from Africa to the Americas were sold in foreign colonies rather than in the Danish islands. Danes bought 17,113 slaves in Africa, an average of 1,426 per year. Of these, 12,062 were bought at the Danish forts on the Gold Coast; but only 6,229 slaves were sold by Danish slave ships in the Danish West Indies. In 1784 and 1785 there were eight Danish ships involved in the slave trade; these were the peak years, corresponding to the end of the War of the American Revolution.[44] Not all slaves brought to St. Croix came directly from Africa. At Frederiksted, the town on the western end of the island, slaves were imported from other parts of the Caribbean, especially from the English Leeward Islands.[45]

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[42]Julius Schovelin, Den danske Handelsempire; Forhold og Personer i det 18 Aarhundredes sidste Halvdel (2 vols.; Copenhagen: Nordiske Forlag, 1899), II, 135.

[43]"Forestillingen angaaende Negerhandelens Afskaffelse," Minerva, April 1792, p. 64.

[44]Ibid., pp. 53-54. See Appendix III.

[45]Green-Pedersen, "The Scope . . . of the Danish . . . Slave Trade," p. 155.

Foreigners were allowed to sell slaves at St. Thomas by an edict of 1785 which was intended to help that island become a center of the transit slave trade. In 1785-1786, and 1789-1790, only about 25 per cent of the slaves brought to St. Thomas were retained for labor there and on St. John; the rest were exported to other colonies in the Caribbean, in particular to Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Santo Domingo. Slaves from the Dutch, English, and French Lesser Antilles were also funneled through St. Thomas for sale to the Spanish islands in the Greater Antilles.[46]

On April 28, 1787, the Board of Finance sent to the General Customs Department for its consideration some proposals for improving the slave trade. The latter department decided to obtain suggestions from the government of the Danish West Indies and on May 15 sent the Finance Department's letter on to St. Croix. The sixteen-page report sent back to Copenhagen by the government on St. Croix, dated October 15, 1787, contained introductory remarks which, surprisingly, condemned the slave trade and slavery:

> So long as the black color, despite philosophy, is the mark of servitude on many thousands of people, so long as one continues to believe that the West Indian colonies can be cultivated only by slaves, so long as people can be exchanged for gold and silver, and so long as the European nations compete to see who shall enjoy the greatest advantage in this unnatural trade and who shall be most successful at increasing the number of slaves, so long as these conditions exist, a sensitive business expert [en følsom Handelskyndig] must stifle every cry of freedom and sympathy in his bosom. He must consider himself to represent a state, and states, as we know, are aware of no more important law than to seek to become richer than

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[46] Ibid., pp. 162ff.

> their neighbor . . . .
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> In the European balance Denmark is not rich enough (nor does its example seem likely to be strong enough) to be able to free all the slaves from their bonds wherever the Danish flag flies, and to cause a revolution in the Guinea trade. That honor seems to be reserved for a richer nation and a more favorable era. We therefore should now, as instructed, furnish our views concerning means by which the slave trade can be made most profitable for Denmark and the Danish colonies, and forget the disagreeable aspects involved in such an investigation. However, surrounded as we are by enslaved blacks, we find consolation in the thought of being able to contribute to making their circumstances bearable.[47]

These words of sympathy for the slaves and of distaste for the "unnatural trade" are all the more remarkable in view of the later role which their primary author, Governor-General Ernst Frederik von Walterstorff, was to play as a leading spokesman for those wishing to resume the slave trade after its cessation in January 1803. In 1787 Walterstorff, who had married into the planter class on St. Croix, probably felt that an expression of humanitarian sentiment would favorably impress his superiors in the Danish government without actually leading to anything that would endanger the prosperity of the planters. Yet his criticism of the slave trade and slavery could only have been encouraging to those high officials in Copenhagen who favored abolition.

The report was unsympathetic towards the Baltic-Guinea

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[47]Danish State Archives, Copenhagen. Vestindisk-guineisk Rente samt Generaltoldkammer, Om Negerhandelens Afskaffelse. Bemaerkninger ved den, Regieringen, igiennem det kongelige vestindiske Kammer h. d. 15de Maii 1787, tilsendte Extract af det kongl: Finants-Collegii Skrivelse d.d. 28de April e.a., angaaende Slave-handelen, og den sikkerste Maade, ievnligen directe at forsyne Ste. Crux med de fornødne Negre (Report of the government of the Danish West Indies on the slave trade and the best way of guaranteeing St. Croix a regular supply of slaves), October 15, 1787.

Company. It argued that the company had not supplied St. Croix with enough slaves and had sold slaves on other islands where prices were higher.[48]

The report noted the complaints made by the Baltic-Guinea Company that prices for slaves were too low on St. Croix to make the slave trade to the Danish islands profitable. The report then suggested that prices in the French islands had been unusually high during the first years of the 1780s due to the influence of the War of the American Revolution, "when the French islands had virtually no supply of slaves, except what the Danish Guinea Company and Portuguese ships could supply them, which meant that prices for slaves had to be higher in the French colonies, where there were more buyers [than in the Danish islands]." Other reasons were given for the greater profitability of slave-trading to the French islands (see Appendix VI), but the report argued that the Baltic-Guinea Company could sell slaves to the Danish islands at a considerable profit if only the company followed certain basic rules of commerce listed in the report and said to be of great importance for success especially in the slave trade. The colonial government calculated the average price at which slaves were sold on St. Croix between 1778-1787 at 214 rigsdaler and estimated the total cost of bringing each slave to St. Croix at 94 rigsdaler if purchased with rum, and 140 rigsdaler

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[48]The Company was not required to sell its slaves in the Danish islands, yet its monopoly on trade with the Danish Guinea forts made it virtually impossible for private Danish merchants to participate in the slave trade.

if purchased with European merchandise. Therefore the company should have earned excellent profits from the slave trade to St. Croix.[49]

The government of the West Indies wrote that instructions received from the Management of the Royal Guinea Trade (den kongelige Guineiske Handels Direktion) in Copenhagen in 1781 had resulted in the sale of only the weakest and sickliest slaves (Udskudsvarer) on St. Croix while the better half of each slave cargo was sent on to St. Thomas for sale to foreigners.[50] These instructions, the report said, had given rise to a hatred among the planters towards the Baltic-Guinea Company, for they had thought that the company was designed to supply St. Croix frequently with healthy slaves. The report said the average price of 214 rigsdaler per slave sold on St. Croix was rather low, considering the risks involved in the slave trade; it insisted that this low price was not caused by specific local conditions on St. Croix but rather by abundant "bad luck" [Uheld] and the poor condition of slaves offered for sale on the island.

Part of the reason for the wretched condition of the company's slaves, according to the report, could be found in the fact that some of the company's ships had originally been constructed

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[49]Report of the government of the Danish West Indies on the slave trade, October 15, 1787, pp. 2-5.

[50]But it was not true that approximately half of each slave cargo was sent to St. Thomas. The government's own enclosed data contradicts this statement. See Appendix IV.

for use in whaling; also, the surgeons on the Baltic-Guinea Company's slave ships were characterized by lack of knowledge and skill [Uvidenhed og Ukyndighed]. Worst of all, in 1782 and 1783, years when demand for slaves was high in the French colonies, the company had sold no slaves on St. Croix. The average number of slaves sold by Danish slavers on St. Croix between 1778 and 1787 was 508 annually. But the colonial government argued that St. Croix needed at least three times that many. It would therefore not be harmful to the planters were the company to lose its monopoly on trade with the Danish Guinea forts.[51]

The report suggested that all Danish vessels, including those from St. Croix but not those from St. Thomas (ships from the latter island were too likely to be owned by foreigners), should be permitted to participate in the slave trade from Danish Guinea; it also listed other changes which it felt should be made in the rules regulating trade to St. Croix.[52] Foreign ships, the report advised, should not be allowed to participate in the slave trade to the Danish islands: "For it is certain that the Americans can sail with less expense than most other nations, especially ours, and would therefore soon undersell the Danish merchants if their ships were

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[51] Ibid., pp. 6-9. See Appendix V.

[52] Ibid., p. 9. See Appendix VI. The report urged allowing Englishmen to serve as captains on Danish slave ships because English captains were better acquainted with the slave trade, withstood the warm climate better than Danes, spoke the language that was dominant on the Guinea Coast, and for these reasons would be likely to do a better job of looking after the interests of the ship owners.

permitted to transport slaves to St. Croix."[53]

The report closed with a comment on the value of freedom of trade and on the evils of trade restrictions, especially in the form of monopoly trading companies. Because of the lesson learned in recent years from the failure of so many Danish monopoly companies, the West Indian government concluded that "the patriot can now, with hopeful anticipation, look forward to . . . happier times for the state."[54]

By the time the report arrived, Schimmelmann had already arranged the liquidation of the Baltic Guinea Company and its replacement with de Coninck's company, enjoying similar privileges. Yet there remained the basic problem of what to do with a slave trade that seemed incapable of earning enough to meet expenses.

In November 1786 Schimmelmann had set up a committee to study the Guinea trade. The committee reported in June 1787 that in its opinion the Guinea trade, including the slave trade, could not be expected to break even. This report led to renewed interest in the idea of establishing plantations in Africa so that tropical products could be produced there, ending the need to transport slaves to the West Indies. Bargum's Trading Association had originally suggested the possibility of establishing plantations on the Gold Coast and had even brought in three missionaries in 1768 in hopes

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[53] Ibid., p. 12.

[54] Ibid., p. 14.

they would succeed in doing so. But the original missionaries and their replacements died before they could accomplish anything.[55]

During his lengthy stay on the Gold Coast, Isert concluded that plantations in Africa were a possible means of making the slave trade unnecessary. After wondering whether Europeans could do without sugar, coffee, chocolate, and other tropical products, he wrote:

> No! That would only make a large number of Europeans unhappy, just as it might make the Africans happy. Why weren't our forefathers intelligent enough to establish plantations in Africa? Where they could have obtained enough workers at less cost? But no, the discovery of America was more flattering to their vanity [schmeichelte der Eitelkeit besser]. The Europeans would certainly have been ruthless enough to do the same thing to Africa as they did to America, but Africa is a large continent with too many inhabitants to be so easily brought under control . . . . After the Europeans murdered the original inhabitants of America and populated the land with Africans, who had either been purchased or simply kidnapped [gestohlen] and brought to America, the Europeans believed they could enjoy undisturbed possession of a kind of property which causes nature to rebel and one's conscience to suffer torture.
>
> Africa remains that part of the world where, by establishing plantations, all the products which we now acquire from America could be produced and the shameful export of Negroes from their happy fatherland gradually could be restrained. The blacks would gladly grant to the Europeans the best and largest of the land areas which have lain desolate for millenia, if only the Europeans would approach them with an olive branch in hand instead of deadly weapons, and for only a small payment they would help us.[56]

In Copenhagen Isert published a book on his experiences in Africa and the West Indies, and met with Schimmelmann, who agreed to support Isert's plan for establishing plantations on the Gold

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[55]Nørregaard, Guldkysten, pp. 270-71, 206-07.

[56]Isert, Reise nach Guinea und den Carabaischen Inseln, pp. 338-40.

Coast.[57] In 1788 Isert returned to Danish Guinea equipped with royal authorization to set up a plantation, money advanced by the government, and the rank of captain. With the help of an African friend, Isert established a plantation in the interior and formed an alliance with an African chieftain who agreed to protect the plantation in exchange for Danish arms. But Isert died on January 21, 1789, before any lasting results could be achieved. With his unique ability to work with Negroes, his faith in his mission, and his knowledge of Africa, Isert was undoubtedly the ideal man to establish successful plantations in Danish Guinea, and with his death the effort to do so lost all real hope of success. Though further attempts were made, a viable plantation economy was never established.[58]

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[57]Henrik Jeppesen, "Danske Plantageanlaeg paa Guldkysten 1788-1860," Geografisk Tidsskrift, LXV (December 1966), 50.

[58]Nørregaard, Guldkysten, pp. 272ff. That Isert's death was lamented by Schimmelmann is shown in a letter from Countess Charlotte Schimmelmann to Countess Louise Stolberg (born Reventlow), on January 9, 1790, in which she wrote: "Isert died of a putrid fever after having made the most commendable beginning towards the new republic; alas, he spent only six months there. The blacks are lamenting his death as if they had lost their father. They say that his great genius had directed [presidé] all he had done, and that no one could worthily replace him. His wife survived him by only a month. I have shed tears at the tragic end of this good family. Ernst was keenly affected when he learned the news and exclaimed: 'No, I am not at all happy, I ought to renounce these concerns [je devrois renoncer aux affaires].' It is true that he has little happiness, when one thinks of what he would have been able to do and would have wished to bestow round about him; they have not understood him, they will never understand him in Denmark." See Bobé, Reventlowske Familiekreds, IV, 121-22.

Schimmelmann always believed himself to be marked by ill-fortune. He tried to do too much and was nearly overwhelmed by his many duties. His responsibilities were enormous: in addition to his many business enterprises and his posts as head of the Board of Finance and the Board of Trade, he was also head of the Bureau of Treasury Management (Skatkammerdirektion), the Credit Bureau (Kreditkassen), a director of the Greenland,Icelandic, Faroe Island, and Finmark trade, and head of the Commission for Liquidation of the West Indian Debt (den vestindiske gaelds likvidations Direktion). A countess wrote of him in 1787: "Schimmelmann continues to work and do his best to bring everything into disarray. His office is an abyss where everything is confused and disappears; if he doesn't go mad, it will be a miracle."[59]

Schimmelmann has been criticized for indecision and for a tendency to heed too willingly the opinions of his associates and subordinates. Holm views Schimmelmann as "a lovable person . . . who wanted to do as much good as possible, easy to live with and unselfish as few others."[60] A Norwegian official who worked with Schimmelmann discussed him thusly:

> This knowledgeable, broad-minded, ingenious [geniale], and noble man was poorly fitted to serve as an administrator and least of all as finance minister under an absolute monarchical constitution. He lacked power of resistance and self-confidence. He was in addition insufficiently Scandinavian. He should have devoted himself to scientific and scholarly activities.[61]

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[59]Holm, Danmark-Norges Historie, VI, Part I, pp. 202-203. Letter by Countess Schulin, October 27, 1787.

[60]Holm, Danmark-Norges Historie, V, 620.

[61]Ibid., VI, Part I, p. 203.

Schimmelmann's humanitarian sympathy for the poor in Denmark and the slaves in the West Indies was genuine, though he was ever mindful of his own financial self-interest.[62] In 1782, upon learning that he and Reventlow had been appointed directors of the slave-trading Baltic-Guinea Company, Ernst Schimmelmann wrote to his fiancée, Charlotte Schubart:

> The fate of man is strange. To think that Reventlow and I are directors of a company involved in the slave trade. Ah, if only we were directors of an association created to further the happiness of man! If instead of bringing turmoil and devastation into another part of the world in order there to appeal to avarice and perfidy, we could muster our energies to create there a happier day. This would be, I dare say, a destiny more worthy of us. But one does not serve men more by giving them gold. Those who do so believe in nothing but gold. All their other beliefs are mere formalities--the greatness of the soul exists only in our tales, it is a fiction of the statesmen [la grandeur d'ame n'existe que dans nos contes, c'est la fable des hommes d'etat]. One does not with impunity cause others to suffer, the years and the centuries will bring a vengeance which they have been preparing in secret--already our slaves in America raise luxury products which corrupt and weaken us here in Europe by debasing us and making us more deserving of being slaves in our turn. But we will lose our vain riches one day, we will not have the means to pay for these creatures, these victims. What to do then, when in misery one ridicules, with little success, heroism and mores [Comment faire alors, dans la misere on persifle avec moins de succes l'heroisme et les moeurs]? But, my dear friend, what a digression; it, too, is the fault of this black company.[63]

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[62]Schimmelmann was an ardent adherent of the agrarian reforms for which Christian Ditlev Reventlow and Ludwig Reventlow were the leading spokesmen. See Povl Engelstoft and Svend Dahl, eds., Dansk Biografisk Leksikon (27 vols.; Copenhagen: J. H. Schultz Forlag, 1933-44), XXI, 136. The man directly responsible for establishing the Schimmelmann plantations as model enterprises was Ernst Schimmelmann's first cousin, Heinrich Ludvig Ernst Schimmelmann, who arrived on St. Croix in 1768 to take charge of the plantations. He later served in the government of the Danish West Indies and was governor general. See Bricka, ed., Dansk Biografisk Lexikon, XV, 139.

[63]Bobé, Reventlowske Familiekreds, IV, 14. Letter from Ernst Schimmelmann to Charlotte Schubart, January 9, 1782.

Yet Schimmelmann, despite his distress at being made director of a slave-trading company, invested 23,000 rigsdaler in the company.[64] He later tried hard to save the company, and he secretly acquired stock in its successor.

Schimmelmann's income was heavily dependent on the production of sugar on his plantations in the West Indies and the refining of sugar in Copenhagen. With Isert's death and the apparent failure of the attempt to establish plantations in Guinea, slavery seemed as necessary as ever for the production of sugar, and slavery itself apparently depended on the continuation of the slave trade, for without the latter the slave population would decline, and so would sugar production. Schimmelmann could not tolerate an immediate abolition of the slave trade; but perhaps some means of "gradual" abolition could be found which would end the immoral slave trade and still permit the Danish West Indies to flourish. In the meantime no action was taken on the recommendations of the government of the Danish West Indies, and the monopoly on trade with Danish Guinea was continued after 1787 by de Coninck's slave-trading company.

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[64]Sveistrup and Willerslev, Den danske Sukkerhandel, p. 114.

CHAPTER III

The Report of the Committee on the Slave Trade

In June 1791 Schimmelmann drew up a twenty-page proposal urging that a committee be established to investigate the possibility of abolishing the slave trade to the Danish West Indies. It is clear that Schimmelmann himself, a deeply religious "man of feeling," regarded the slave trade with a strong sense of repugnance.[1] His protégé Isert had condemned the slave system, and his sister Julie (Countess Juliana Reventlow) strongly urged him to help the slaves. Her concern for the slaves, which was based on her religious convictions, is credited by Otto Brandt with having been a major factor in motivating Schimmelmann to act in favor of abolition.[2] She believed one of her most important tasks was to promote, in cooperation with her brother, the work of the Moravian missionaries among the slaves in the Danish West Indies and to improve the lot of the slaves.[3]

In a letter to Schimmelmann on February 17, 1789, Julie

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[1]Schimmelmann's own religious feelings are revealed in letters in Bobé, Reventlowske Familiekreds, IV, p. 13 and p. 22. He was president of the Danish Bible Society in 1813.

[2]Otto Brandt, Geistesleben und Politik in Schleswig-Holstein um die Wende des 18. Jahrhunderts (2d. ed., rev.; Kiel: Walter Mühlau Verlag, 1927), p. 113.

[3]Ibid., p. 107.

Reventlow noted that she had been deeply moved by a re-reading of David Cranz's history of the conversion of the slaves.[4] She urged that the slaves be granted an extra day off each week to work their garden plots and that regulations be enacted to improve the treatment of slaves, especially elderly and sick ones. She proposed that Moravian missionaries, who had been "angels from Heaven" for the slaves, be used to see that ameliorative regulations were enforced on the plantations and expressed the belief that "It is our calling [Beruf] to alleviate the slaves' miserable existence and to obtain for them these improvements by means of our own personal sacrifice."[5] One could not allow present conditions to continue:

> Something at least must be done for these oppressed people [diese Gedrückten] if we want our lives to be happy [wenn wir unsers Lebens froh werden wollen]. With horror I think of the arbitrary floggings which the slaves receive without the least justification.
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> The poorest peasant, for whom one feels sympathy, is still far better off than the slaves. If our ideals are only impracticable schemes, oh, then I would like to hide myself in a hole . . . .[6]

Julie Reventlow did not envisage an immediate emancipation

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[4]David Cranz, Den gamle og nye Brødre Historie eller: Det Evangeliske Brødre-Unitets korte Historie i de aeldre Tider og i Saerdeleshed udi naervaerende Aarhundrede (Copenhagen, 1772). Cranz's book was a history of all the Moravian missions down to 1769. He was himself a Moravian.

[5]Bobé, Reventlowske Familiekreds, IV, 340. Julie Reventlow was one of the five members of the Schimmelmann family trust, which derived the overwhelming part of its income from the four Schimmelmann plantations and the sugar refineries in Copenhagen.

[6]Ibid., p. 341.

of the slaves, but thought of it as a long-range goal:

> To give the slaves complete freedom will indeed remain the ideal, but to ease their lot, that we will be able to do, I pray to God; and perhaps we can, after a number of years, emancipate them and purchase no new slaves. The Quakers in Pennsylvania paid for the Negroes' labor and gave them their freedom, because they found it wrong for Christians to hold slaves. In so doing the Quakers benefited their worldly interests too. The loyalty and diligence of their black workers increased and none of them wanted to leave the Quakers.[7]

The countess, by way of emphasizing the depth of her concern for the slaves, closed her letter by adding: "I have exhausted myself completely [Ich habe mich ganz epuisirt]. You cannot imagine how often these thoughts occupy me and agitate my heart [mein innerstes erschüttern]."[8]

Julie Reventlow's husband, Count Fritz Reventlow, was much more restrained than his wife in desiring to help the slaves. In a letter to Ernst Schimmelmann dated June 14, 1789, obviously written in response to some proposals by Schimmelamnn for improving the treatment of slaves on the Schimmelmann family plantations, Reventlow made dutiful comments on the need to help the slaves, but urged an extremely cautious approach: "I share with you, my dear Ernst, your wish to improve the lot of the poor black slaves on our plantations . . . ." Reventlow then argued that neither sentiment nor humanitarian feelings should motivate one to help the slaves but, rather, a sense of Christian duty which "requires our actions and the necessary sacrifices." But he continued:

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[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

> It is no less true that a zeal which carried us beyond our capacities, a theory of duties which circumstances, and even those abuses intimately linked to the circumstances, prevented entirely from being practiced would--rather than being useful to the goal which we propose--only put us farther away from achieving it.[9]

Reventlow added that though it was completely wrong for anyone to own other persons as property, "property rights to all possessions except human beings ought to be inviolable, . . . a natural right." He continued, apparently fearful that Schimmelmann would go too far in attempting to help the slaves, by arguing that there was no natural law or precept of religion "which obligates us or requires us to deprive ourselves of our whole fortune for the benefit of the slaves." Indeed, tampering with slavery might have "baleful consequences [conséquences funestes]."

> The actual happiness of the slaves, their genuine well-being, is now determined by the fortune of their masters, and such is not only the . . . abusive law of their own particular fate: it is the law of all humanity.
>
> The divine sentence which condemned man to earn his bread by the sweat of his brow is quite general, since the exception is infinitely small in comparison with the number of those upon whom it is carried out daily, and in all probability will continue . . . as long as the world is as we know it. It is to that sentence that the inequality among men, both as to power and means, is linked by an indissoluble bond, and therefrom stems the absolute impossibility of general or complete liberty.[10]

Reventlow then urged Schimmelmann to take plenty of time selecting the right man to send to St. Croix to carry out reforms to help the slaves on the Schimmelmann family plantations, for choosing

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[9]Bobé, Reventlowske Familiekreds, VIII, 287. This letter was translated from the French by Channing Horner, Northwest Missouri State University.

[10]Ibid., pp. 288-89.

the wrong man "could wipe out instantly our whole fortune and with it all the good we intend to do." He proceeded to argue that more data concerning the plantations was needed before any action should be taken.[11]

Judging from Reventlow's letter, especially his rejection of the thought of "complete freedom," it would appear likely that Schimmelmann, writing to Reventlow at some time after receiving the letter of February 17, 1789, from Julie Reventlow, had, in addition to listing proposals to ameliorate the slaves' living conditions, also mentioned the possibility of emancipation. Schimmelmann clearly was concerned with improving the treatment of the slaves--he asked Hans West, prior to the latter's departure for St. Croix in 1788, to send back recommendations for appropriate ameliorative measures.[12] Schimmelmann's humanitarian desire to help the slaves on his plantations probably was strengthened by his realization that improving the slaves' living conditions might make it possible to increase the ~~slave~~ population by natural means, ending the need for further purchase of Africans.

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[11] Ibid., pp. 289-91.

[12] West mentions this in a plan for improving the treatment of the field slaves which he sent to the General Customs Department on August 17, 1791, entitled Plan til ved et enkelt Forsøg at befordre Mark-Negrenes Oplysning og Formildelse i Kaar m.v. paa Eilandet St. Croix, p. 12, DSA, Ventindisk-guineisk Rente samt Generaltoldkammer, Om Negerhandelens Afskaffelse. He wrote: "Schimmelmann, before I left the fatherland, often showed his trust in me by sharing with me, both orally and in writing, his thoughts on improvements he hoped to make on his plantations here to alleviate the lot of the slaves [at formilde den lavere Medbroders Kaar]."

That there was already some anti-slavery sentiment in Copenhagen, aside from Schimmelmann's circle, is indicated by criticism in the weekly Laerde Efterretninger of West's comments on West Indian slavery contained in an eighty-three-page article entitled "Beretning om det danske Eiland St. Croix i Vestindien, fra Juniimaaned 1789 til Junii maaneds Udgang 1790" which he published in the July 1791 edition of Iris. Laerde Efterretninger attacked West's views that the slaves were well treated, that the slaves and the free colored were lazy and debauched persons who were inclined to thievery, and said West praised the West Indian social and legal system only because it allowed 2,000 whites to rule 22,000 blacks. The writer added: "It is incredible that a thinking man can write such things."[13]

The Danish slave trade had continued to languish after being taken over by de Coninck's new company in 1787. Only four slave ships made the voyage from the Guinea Coast to the West Indies in 1788-89, and in 1790-91 only two ships were sent out. (See Appendix III.) Schimmelmann concluded there was no likelihood that the number of Danish ships used in the slave trade could be increased. In 1790-91 the Danish forts on the Guinea Coast sold their excess slaves to French ships.[14]

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[13]Laerde Efterretninger, Copenhagen, No. 42, 1791, pp. 658-63. West, though he defended slavery, did criticize the slave trade: "Of course, the slave trade is a horror which stains our Christianity and shames our so-called philosophical century." See Iris, Copenhagen, July 1791, p. 57.

[14]DSA, Vestindisk-guineisk Rente samt Generaltoldkammer, Dokumenter vedkommende Kommissionen for Negerhandelens bedre

The international situation was probably another influence on Schimmelmann's thinking. The English abolitionist movement had been gaining strength in the late 1780s, and its progress was followed closely by Schimmelmann, in whose private archives there is a 71-page, hand-written German translation of the April 18, 1791, debate in the House of Commons on the abolition of the slave trade.[15] Despite the rejection of William Wilberforce's motion for abolition of the slave trade, Schimmelmann, from his reading of the debate in Parliament, concluded that the victory of abolition in England was imminent, for the most influential and respected members of the Commons (William Pitt, Charles James Fox, and Edmund Burke) had favored ending the slave trade.[16] If England (and, perhaps, France) were to oppose the slave trade, could smaller powers such as Denmark continue to engage in it? Was there not a risk that Denmark might be forced to abandon the slave trade at a time when continued importation of slaves was imperative for sugar production in the Danish West Indies? Perhaps by announcing that Denmark intended to abolish

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Indretning og Ophaevelse, Allerunterthänigste Vorstellung an ihro Königliche Majestät, December 28, 1791, p. 23.

[15]DSA, Ernst Schimmelmanns Privat Arkiv, Pk. 11, Koncepter angaaende Slavehandelen og Negervaesenet i Vestindien og Kopier vedr. Sierra Leone Kolonien, Debatten im Unterhause des englischen Parlaments über die Abschaffung des Sclavenhandels. The translation was based on an extract of the debate published "in one of the best English newspapers," The Diary or Woodfall's Register, according to a note on p. 1. of the translation.

[16]DSA, Vestindisk-guineisk Rente samt Generaltoldkammer, Dokumenter vedkommende Kommissionen for Negerhandelens bedre Indretning og Ophaevelse, Ernst Schimmelmann's Bedenken (on the slave trade), June 18, 1791, p. 1.

the slave trade after a transition period lengthy enough to permit building up the slave labor force in the islands prior to abolition, the Danish government could protect itself from possible foreign pressure to end the slave trade and guarantee the future of sugar production in the Danish islands.[17]

Schimmelmann was also surely aware that his four plantations, two on St. Croix and one each on St. Thomas and St. Jan, would be better able than others to overcome any difficulties arising from abolition, for they were notably well stocked with laborers, and the slaves on them had in recent years shown a tendency to maintain their ranks without any great dependence on the Atlantic slave trade. Immediately prior to the publication of the abolition edict in 1792, Justitsraad C. Hansteen, a member of the General Customs Department, had presented to the department his arguments against abolition, and in so doing noted that Schimmelmann's plantations, unlike the others, already had enough slaves and had sufficient land to allow for planting yams, corn and other crops to provide ample food for the slaves, something which other plantations were hard pressed to manage.[18] Schimmelmann in fact stood to gain from any overall decrease in sugar production in the Danish West Indies, for his share of

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[17]Svend Green-Pedersen, "Danmarks ophaevelse of negerslavehandelen: omkring tilblivelsen af forordningen af 16. Marts 1792," Arkiv. III, No. 1, 1969, p. 36.

[18]DSA, Vestindisk-guineisk Rente samt Generaltoldkammer, Dokumenter vedkommende Kommissionen til Negerhandelens bedre Indretning og Ophaevelse, Justitsraads Hansteens Allerunderdanigst Forestilling, March 14, 1792, pp. 1-2.

production was likely to increase if abolition caused difficulties for other planters, as the price of sugar might then rise, and his share of the market for raw sugar in Denmark would expand.

Schimmelmann's efforts to make the Danish slave trade profitable had failed, as had his attempt to use Isert to establish tropical plantations on the Gold Coast. He had long regarded the slave trade as immoral although, paradoxically, he had maintained major investments in it, and obviously his moral sensibility was not strong enough to induce him to interfere with profits when there was a conflict between the two. Yet he knew that if he could devise a means of abolishing the trade without bringing financial harm to Denmark, the Danish colonies, or the Schimmelmann family trust, he would win the praise of contemporaries in Denmark and obtain favorable recognition for the Danish Crown abroad. In the late spring of 1791 his plans for ending the Danish slave trade solidified, perhaps in part because of the apparent progress of the abolitionist movement in England and the political prominence in France of Brissot de Warville, head of the amis des noirs.

On June 18, 1791, Schimmelmann sent a proposal for abolishing the slave trade to an unknown member of the Danish government, addressed merely as "your excellency," along with a letter which explained the background and reasons for the proposal and urged full cooperation. In the letter, Schimmelmann noted that he had already spoken with Bernstorff and had received assurances of the latter's cooperation, and said that Bernstorff favored implementing Schimmelmann's proposals by means of a special committee in Copenhagen

which would assign to another committee in the West Indies the task of carrying out reforms to help the slaves. According to Schimmelmann, "The proposals in my essay contain nothing which could bring about the destruction of private property or the infringement of private property rights, for the proposals are aimed at protecting private property and at prodding the planters to base their own profits [Vortheil] on something more secure than a temporary use [Benutzung]."[19]

Schimmelmann added, "It has become necessary to reach a decision about the slave trade and the principles and regulations to be applied to it in the future," which was probably a reference to the inability of the Danish slave trade to prosper. He opposed involving the government of the Danish West Indies in drawing up a final plan, for that "would only be another way of rejecting the entire plan and would perhaps, for no reason at all, stir up such a tumult [Gährung] as not even a decision to adopt my proposals would produce."[20] He concluded by stating that if his proposals were accepted, "the Crown Prince and Denmark could set a great

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[19]Letter by Ernst Schimmelmann accompanying his Bedenken on the slave trade, June 18, 1791. Here Schimmelmann meant that instead of continuing to rely on the slave trade to replace laborers who had been worked to death in just a few years (what he called "eine temporaire Benutzung), it would be more profitable for the planters to treat their slaves better and thereby end the need for the slave trade.

[20]Apparently Schimmelmann feared difficulties would arise not from the government of the Danish West Indies itself, which had already recorded its distress at being involved with slavery (see above, pp. 55-56), but from the Borgerraad, or burger council, which represented the planters.

example."[21]

Schimmelmann in July 1791 convinced the government to establish a committee to investigate the slave trade and then sent the committee a copy of his essay. In a brief accompanying letter he noted that he had learned he was to be appointed to the committee and said he wanted to give the committee a chance to study his essay in hopes that committee members might use his Bedenken as a basis for their deliberations.[22]

Schimmelmann began his twenty-page Bedenken by stating that the debate in the House of Commons of April 18, 1791, on a proposal to abolish the slave trade "cannot but rouse the greatest attention in all the other states which conduct the [slave] trade."

> The leaders of both parties in England, who are distinguished by their influence, talent, patriotism and authority, have voted for the abolition of the slave trade. The most important political and scientific societies as well as the best part of the nation have all declared themselves in favor of this motion [for abolition].[23]

The proposal had failed, Schimmelmann believed, because it had called for immediate abolition. Had the slave trade been abolished immediately, "the wealth and the profits [Erwerb] of many persons would have suffered and perhaps in part have been lost as a consequence of such an abrupt and absolute decision to abolish the slave trade."

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[21]Letter by Ernst Schimmelmann accompanying his Bedenken on the slave trade, June 18, 1791.

[22]Introductory letter of July 16, 1791, accompanying Schimmelmann's handwritten Bedenken (proposal on the slave trade).

[23]Ernst Schimmelmann's Bedenken, June 18, 1791, p. 1.

> If . . . immediate and complete abolition were decided upon, how could those who have placed their capital in this trade save their investments? How would they be able to dispose of their remaining merchandise, their factories, their claims [Forderungen], the wealth they have circulating in the slave trade, if all of these investments should become obsolete . . . as a result of abolition? How would the planters be able to save themselves, since their economy at present depends on the purchase rather than the breeding [Zuziehung] of slaves?[24]

Schimmelmann then proceeded to a consideration of what he thought was the basic question which had to be answered before abolition of the slave trade could become feasible: could the slave population in the West Indies be maintained without continued dependence on the slave trade? He was well aware that, hitherto, slave populations in the West Indies and Brazil had failed to maintain themselves by natural means. He asked:

> How is it possible to establish on all the plantations the correct ratio of male to female slaves necessary for propagation, without importing more slaves? How can the debauchery which impedes the growth of the slave population be done away with promptly, and marriages and morals encouraged to promote population growth? How . . . in conformity with the present system of cultivation in the West Indies . . . [can] the labor of the slaves be lightened to the extent needed to further the growth of their population and the rearing of their children? What recourse [Rettungsmittel] is there for those who, because of misfortunes and calamities, such as epidemic diseases, lose a considerable part of their slaves and creole slave-children [Creol-Kinder].[25]

Schimmelmann believed that both the abolitionists and their opponents had spent too much time discussing the harmful or beneficial effects of the slave trade and not enough studying "the fundamental point [Haupt-Bemerkung] . . . that the great value of the West Indian

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[24] Ibid., pp. 2-3.

[25] Ibid., p. 4. "Creole" slaves were those slaves born in the Americas.

colonies and the benefits they provide for the countries which possess them depend on the cultivation of sugar cane, and that the cultivation of this product has been pursued in accordance with an economic system which requires the constant acquisition of new slaves." He blamed the European nations, "England in particular," for enacting laws and encouraging commerce which made the slave trade a necessity. An unlimited form of slavery had been established in the West Indies and America leaving the slaves "completely abandoned to the absolute will of harsh masters and still harsher overseers."[26]

Schimmelmann then raised the question of whether a law abolishing the slave trade could be enforced at present. He noted that resistance to abolition would be strong among the planters and that forcing them to comply would involve so many difficulties that the mother country might eventually allow the law to be disregarded. Aware that the Danish slave trade could not be considered in isolation, Schimmelmann wondered whether all the slave-trading nations would be able to unite in favor of abolition and to enforce it effectively. He was particularly conscious of the importance of England and France:

> Do England and France, if they should reach an agreement in favor of abolition, have the power to use force in compelling the obedience of their colonies? Will they really want to expose themselves to the embarrassment and the losses which could be the result of enforcing abolition? Does not the most important commerce of both nations, as well as the maintenance of their finances and their inhabitants, depend on the preservation of the West Indian colonies? If France and England unite on a

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[26] Ibid., pp. 4-5

> common policy, will Spain, Portugal, Holland, and North America adopt the same measures?
>
> Is not an effective abolition measure more important than an unworkable prohibition?[27]

Schimmelmann moved next to the immorality of the slave trade, stating he assumed that all persons "well-acquainted with the slave trade and the manner in which it is presently conducted would agree that the practicable abolition of the slave trade is a duty of humanity."

> It is impossible to maintain that the sale of slaves in Africa does not, by means of the constant demands of Europeans to purchase slaves, give rise to a demand for brandy, rum, gunpowder, guns, copper, and various manufactured goods, which have become indispensable for the African tribes [Neger-Nationen]. Slaves are at present virtually the sole important article of exchange [Tauschwaare] possessed by the Africans. Therefore the African tribes must procure slaves, no matter what the cost . . . . Prisoners of war and criminals are sold to Europeans as slaves in accordance with the custom of the African tribes. When war and infringement of the laws do not by themselves provide enough slaves, should not private warfare, violence, and kidnapping be used and engaged in, so that the needed victims can be procured? There is yet another consequence which must follow from the slave trade: since slaves are the main article of trade which Africa produces, since slaves are themselves the most expensive merchandise, they are not used to produce and gather merchandise which could serve as articles of commerce with the Europeans. It seems more profitable and convenient to exchange the people themselves instead of the potential products of their diligence and labor. Therefore every native industry and type of production must remain stifled in embryo [im ihrem ersten keim erstikt werden], and the epoch of savagery and barbarism must last as long as the slave trade itself.[28]

Not only does the slave trade devastate Africa--it also causes corruption and depopulation in the West Indies. The plantation owners merely purchase new slaves instead of caring properly for the

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[27] Ibid., pp. 7-8

[28] Ibid., pp. 8-9.

slaves they already own. As a result, "the sparing of slave mothers and the rearing of slave children receive insufficient attention." Normal family life among the slaves is also rendered impossible by the planters' recourse to the slave trade, for the planters have little incentive to encourage "the kind of moral behavior [Sitten] which promotes marriages, and consequently morals in general."[29]

Schimmelmann regarded individual examples of cruelty connected with the slave trade as unavoidable consequences of a system of commerce in human beings in which personal profit was the guiding motive of those involved: "It is impossible to shackle so large a number of people of different tribes and ages for many months in the hold of a ship without bringing on their untimely death and unnatural destruction, which are consequences of the journey and the accompanying sickness, debility, sorrow, and change of climate." To those who die on the ships during the Middle Passage must be added those who perish in the West Indies soon after their arrival. Normally from 30 to 40 per cent of the slaves taken from Africa die during these two periods, and "these usual and inevitable causes of destruction" can be augmented if, for instance, the ships are delayed and forced to sail along the African coast to complete their cargo of slaves, for there is then an added risk of epidemics and slave insurrections on the ships.[30]

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[29] Ibid., p. 9.

[30] Ibid., pp. 10-11.

Concerning the treatment of slaves in the islands, Schimmelmann noted that West Indian slavery had been variously described as harsh or mild, depending on the purpose of the writer. Nevertheless, certain conclusions could be drawn: "deliberate inhumanity or cruelty" was not a major factor; rather, mistreatment of the slaves could be ascribed to the slave system itself.

> The labor of the slaves is in general extremely heavy and is rigorously exacted. Their diet and maintenance are confined to necessities. The women and children are used for heavy field labor; and the slave women, even when pregnant or suckling their children, must nevertheless engage in the usual field work. The work is evenly allotted, and the variations in physical strength among the slaves certainly are not considered carefully. Common matters of dispute among the planters and overseers are whether or not it is more profitable to overwork the slaves in the extreme, without any consideration of the impact of such overwork on the slaves themselves, or to take better care of the slaves [so that they might live longer]; and whether it is more profitable for the growth of the slave population to occur by means of natural increase or by the purchase of new slaves.[31]

Schimmelmann summed up the question of the morality of the slave trade by stating that "after sober study and the most careful examination," he was certain that all would agree "that evil, oppression, and misery for humanity in general are inevitably associated with the slave trade, that abolition would be worthy of the efforts of a wise law-giver [Gesetzgeber], and that it must be the duty of everyone who can to assist in bringing about abolition and to contribute everything possible toward that goal."[32]

Schimmelmann then began to discuss "the question we are here

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[31] Ibid., pp. 11-12.

[32] Ibid., p. 12.

primarily concerned with, that is, how it might be possible to abolish the slave trade." He doubted that a total ban on the slave trade would succeed because constant complaints by those whose interests were harmed by abolition would lead the government to ignore violations of the law and would perhaps weaken the authority of the government. He thought that in order for abolition to succeed, "The colonies must be placed in a position where they can maintain their slave population in the future and increase their slave population at the present time . . . . Customs and methods of treating the slaves which can induce a population increase must be established and maintained."[33]

Schimmelmann's belief that the slave trade could be abolished successfully was based on his conviction that improved treatment of the slaves would make the trade unnecessary. The problem involved bringing about a situation, theretofore not achieved anywhere in the West Indies, where there were more births than deaths among the slave population.

> The principal reason for the unnatural decrease of the slave population and for the constant need to import new slaves from Africa is to be found in the treatment and condition of the slaves in the West Indies. If their treatment . . . should ever be based on the principle of promoting the natural increase of the slave population, if the treatment and condition of the slaves were consequently improved and regulated, the time would come when the legislator could dictate as a law something that would already be a reality as a consequence of the measures which the legislator had earlier adopted and promoted.[34]

Schimmelmann then proceeded to list his suggestions for

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[33] Ibid., pp. 12-13.

[34] Ibid., p. 13.

solving the problem of the slave trade in a series of propositions which he hoped the Committee on the Slave Trade would use as a basis for its deliberations:

> 1. In order first and foremost to maintain the present system of cultivation, as many slaves as are still needed to populate the islands must be obtained.
> 2. Those regulations and arrangements which are necessary in order to enable the slaves to multiply their own population by means of natural increase must be enacted.
> 3. The trade in slaves in Africa and the subsequent transportation of slaves to America must, so long as there is no alternative but to permit it, be organized in a regular manner under the supervision of the government.
> 4. There must be put into effect a binding obligation [Verbindlichkeit] on the planters, compelling them to supply their plantations adequately with the number of slaves necessary for the attainment of the previously mentioned goal [that of maintaining the slave population by natural increase alone], and police laws [Polizeigesetze] which, by regulating the treatment of slaves, will result in the preservation of the slave population must be put into effect by the planters.
> 5. During the period in which the importation of slaves is considered a necessity, the slaves will have to be protected; but all regulations which would be drawn up should be considered only as a preparation for a point in time when the importation of slaves would no longer be tolerated (except perhaps as an exception in individual instances).
> 6. If the arrangements decided upon are to have their intended effect, if voluntary agreements thereto are to be effective, it must be stated and made explicit in advance that this epoch is certain of coming to pass, and the date [when the slave trade will be abolished] must not be postponed for so long that the planters who prefer to remain inactive would feel free to do nothing.
> 7. Care will have to be taken to make available to the planters the funds necessary to enable them to carry out the plan, insofar as the planters do not possess the wealth, on their own, to implement the plan.
> 8. The less well-to-do as well as the wealthy planters for whom the needed credit would be provided must, insofar as possible, be given the means of providing the security which is indispensable for obtaining credit.[35]

Thus Schimmelmann envisaged no change in the plantation system and

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[35] Ibid., pp. 14-15.

no end to the institution of slavery; he wanted the Danish government both to try to improve slave treatment in order to attain the goal of a self-sustaining slave population, and to prod the planters to acquire the number of slaves needed to reach that goal on each plantation, with government aid made available for planters needing it for the purpose of buying fresh slaves. This latter proposal would also serve, as Schimmelmann was surely aware, to undermine the planters' opposition to abolition. In order to abolish the slave trade, it would be necessary first to encourage it.

There were additional suggestions which Schimmelmann wanted the committee to consider after it had dealt with the major points. He asked if it would not be wise to specify the number of slaves each plantation needed so that thereafter special attention could be devoted to attaining and maintaining that figure. Ought not the morals and family relationships of the slaves be strengthened as a means of encouraging the birth rate and the rearing of children? Perhaps an arrangement could be made by which de Coninck's slave-trade company (in which Schimmelmann had a secret investment) could sell slaves to the islands at a fixed, low price, in return for being guaranteed a sale? And, if so, would it not be appropriate to allow those planters who lacked a sufficient number of slaves to buy the slaves they needed at that fixed, low price, according to a system which took into account the age and sex of the slaves? In exchange for being allowed to engage in so secure a commercial undertaking, ought not the company be subject to regulations for improving the treatment of slaves at the Guinea forts and during the Atlantic

crossing? Perhaps the company could then be guaranteed payment for the slaves in fixed installments, with the government establishing a loan fund [Negociation] in the islands to make loans at an interest rate of four percent to those planters unable to pay for their slaves in the regular, fixed installments guaranteed to the company? (Schimmelmann apparently had not yet abandoned his attempts to make the slave trade profitable.) Perhaps it would be advisable to allow the loan fund to serve as security [Hypothek] for the planters, because the plantations and slaves which previously provided the requisite security would be an inadequate mortgage if, after abolition, there were plantations on which an adequate number of slaves had not been established. Such a government-supported loan fund would also increase the security of the creditors--the old creditors would not only retain their former guarantee, but would see it improved in the future. Finally, would it be possible to make it easier to export sugar in exchange for slaves and the provisions required for them?[36]

Schimmelmann's concluding statement urged adoption of a plan for abolition based on his proposals:

> If a plan based on the ideas sketched here were to be put into execution, so that the present slave population would not only be maintained but would on the contrary after a certain number of years be increased, thereby putting an end to the need for further importation of slaves, I should then imagine that the cause [Vorschriften] of humanity could not in this regard be in opposition [Widerspruch] to the political and economic interests [Vortheilen] of the state. During the period while the slave trade continued to be necessary, all of its benefits for the commerce and shipping of private subjects would

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[36] Ibid., pp. 15-19.

> exist. The wealth of the West Indian islands would be increased, and the increased production of the islands would enlarge the profits of the mother country. If the time were to come when the importation of slaves into the West Indies were to be discontinued, then the considerable sums which presently must be spent on the slave trade each year by Denmark and her colonies could be saved, and the forts on the African coast would no longer be needed for that purpose.[37]

The committee created to consider the future of the slave trade was established on August 5, 1791.[38] It was given the disarming title of the Committee for Improving the Organization of the Slave Trade in the West Indian Islands and the Coast of Guinea (Kommissionen til Negerhandelens bedre Indretning paa de Vestindiske Ejlande og Kysten Guinea), better known as the Great Committee on the Slave Trade (den store Negerhandels Kommission).

Schimmelmann was the dominant figure on the committee. In addition to him, the committee consisted of Jørgen Erik Skeel, head of the General Customs Department; Fr. Carl Trant and Niels Tønder Lund, high-ranking members of the department; Chr. Brandt, former head of the department and Chancery President (Kancelli-praesident); and Carl Wendt, a member of the Finance Department. Schimmelmann's private secretary, Ernst Philip Kirstein, was the committee's secretary. All of these high-ranking bureaucrats brought with them special experience in colonial administration and finances that qualified them to serve on the committee. Skeel had a good reputation as an administrator who was particularly sympathetic with the poor;

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[37] Ibid., pp. 19-20.

[38] A royal edict of August 5, 1791, created the committee and appointed members to it, beginning with Schimmelmann.

he had been made head of the General Customs Department, in charge of the West Indian and African colonies, in 1789.[39] Trant had served with the West India Company for several years and had been appointed to the General Customs Department in 1790; he was considered an expert on educational reform, having published a book on that subject in 1789 (Über Schulen und Schulanstalten in Dänemark), and was capable of assisting the committee in its deliberations on the education of slave children.[40] Tønder Lund had experience in colonial administration going back to 1778.[41] Brandt had been head of the General Customs Department from 1784 to 1789.[42] Wendt had been Christian Ditlev Reventlow's tutor and had remained a close advisor to Reventlow. He was highly respected in financial matters and had been a member of the Finance Department since 1784.[43]

There was little publicity surrounding the creation of the Committee on the Slave Trade. The committee's full title was, indeed, a smoke screen designed to avoid arousing untimely opposition. One journal which did comment on the committee was Politisches Journal, published in Altona (a Danish port on the Elbe near Hamburg) by G. B. von Schirach, who corresponded with Bernstorff.[44]

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[39] Dansk Biografisk Lexikon, XVIII (1904), 32-33.

[40] Ibid., XVII (1903), 478-79.

[41] Ibid., X (1896), 439-40.

[42] Ibid., III (1889), 3-4.

[43] Ibid., XVIII (1904), 384-385.

[44] Ibid., XIV (1901), 145-46.

An article datelined Copenhagen, September 14, 1791, said that the committee had met several times but, because it had not had enough data, had as yet reached few decisions. The article noted that the purpose of the committee was "not . . . to place without consideration a class of people in a condition of full freedom, for to do so would benefit neither the slaves nor their white masters [Gebietern]." It said:

> The committee will seek in part to remedy in an appropriate [zweckmässige] manner the shortage of slaves on the West Indian plantations, and in part to ameliorate the lot of the slaves as much as possible and to establish regular marital unions among them, whereby it will be possible to hinder the monstrous debauchery [ungeheuern Ausschweifungen] and the dreadful pestilence [schrecklichen Seuchen] which prevail among the slaves, to put them . . . in a thrifty frame of mind [häuslichere Verfassung] and perhaps provide them with some land which they would be able to work for their own profit without, however, owning the land as private property. Happier results can be expected from such wise and suitable measures than from the chimerical projects of romantic-thinking friends of man [romanhaft denkender Menschenfreunde].[45]

The committee's deliberations, which were secret, resulted in a report of 102 folio pages written in German by Kirstein and completed on December 28, 1791. The report began with a brief history of European involvement in the African slave trade, from its beginnings in the fifteenth century with "the depredations [Räubereien] of a single Portuguese ship's captain," and attributed the start of the slave trade to America to the "mistaken zeal of a Spanish priest

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[45] Politisches Journal, Altona, September 1791, pp. 1019-20. The "dreadful pestilence" referred to was probably venereal disease. It is perhaps worth noting that Thorkild Hansen, in his Slavernes Øer, attributes the last line of the above article to Schimmelmann himself and gives no indication of the actual source of the statement. Hansen, Slavernes Øer, p. 268.

[Las Casas] who without reflection found a yoke from which he wanted to free the inhabitants of America at the expense of the inhabitants of Africa." Critics of the trade such as Morgan Godwyn and, later, the American Quakers John Woolman and Anthony Benezet were mentioned, and the Quaker campaign against the slave trade and slavery resulting in "abolition of the slave trade by several provinces in North America and their [the Quakers'] declaring all Negroes in their province free."[46]

The slave trade, the report continued, has recently attracted the attention of various writers, especially in England and France, and the English Parliament has debated the issue of abolition "with the greatest animation." Though until now the party favoring continuation of the slave trade has kept the upper hand, the foremost proponent of abolition, William Wilberforce, will continue to pursue the issue with unremitting ardor, and the leaders of both parties in Parliament have declared themselves strongly in favor of abolition. Therefore, "It is highly probable that the previous rejection of the motion to abolish the slave trade should be regarded not as a final decision but rather as merely a postponement." It is possible that the motion was rejected in order to

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[46]DSA, Vestindisk-guineisk Rente samt Generaltoldkammer, Dokumenter vedkommende Kommissionen for Negerhandelens bedre Indretning og Ophaevelse, Allerunterthänigste Vorstellung, pp. 1-2. This was in reference to Pennsylvania, which in 1780 passed a gradual emancipation law; there were still some slaves in Pennsylvania in 1800--see David Brion Davis, The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), pp. 87-88.

give more time to those who are involved financially in the trade to prepare themselves for a change "which, of course, if it occurred too quickly, would have to be detrimental to their interests. If this is the case, then the matter surely deserves . . . the attention of all nations which have an interest in the slave trade, since it would, after all, be difficult not to follow closely such an example, once given [da es doch vielleicht schwer würde einen einmal gegebenen Beispiel nicht nahzufolgen]."[47]

The report noted that a considerable number of studies of the slave trade had been made by Europeans in recent years, allowing one to arrive at a better-informed view of the trade in all its aspects:

> Because of the indifference with which the slave trade was until recently regarded, such doubts [Bedenklichkeiten] as might arise about the slave trade could be set at ease by the belief that all of the Negroes taken from Africa either were already slaves, whose situation, indeed, was not worsened by their removal from Africa, but might perhaps be improved; or that they were prisoners of war who by being sold into slavery were saved from an otherwise certain death; or that they were criminals who similarly were rescued from death by means of the milder punishment of enslavement. By use of such presumptions [Voraussetzungen] one could easily convince oneself that the slave trade was perhaps even worthy of praise and actually redounded to the benefit of the slaves themselves [zum Glükke der Sclaven selbst gereiche]; it is only more recent testimony by unbiased eyewitnesses [unverdächtigen Augenzeugen] that has explained these circumstances in such a way that one is now compelled to adopt quite a different viewpoint, unless one prefers to avoid the truth by means of far-fetched illusions.[48]

Europeans now are amply informed about the evils of the slave

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[47]Allerunterthänigste Vorstellung, pp. 3-4. The similarity with Schimmelmann's Bedenken is striking.

[48]Ibid., pp. 4-5.

trade, and whites can no longer use ignorance as to the origins of the slaves they purchase as an excuse for continuing to support the trade: "Exempt from immediate involvement with violence in Africa, the Europeans have found it all too easy to disregard the rapine which they have brought on indirectly." Yet in critically examining the slave trade and the harm it causes, it is best to avoid "the simple declamations with which some writers have attacked the slave trade, and by which the writers have only harmed their own cause; only facts [Thatsachen] cannot be refuted." The facts can best be established by the testimony of credible witnesses, and an excellent source of such testimony is the report prepared by a committee of the English Parliament appointed to investigate the slave trade.[49] The report makes it clear that the manner in which the slave traders acquire ownership of slaves on the African coast "consists for the most part of a web of cruelty and injustice."[50]

The Danish committee argued that persons who were already slaves in Africa did not benefit from being sold as slaves in America, as defenders of the slave trade contended. One can safely assume "that the slaves' situation in Africa, where their labor is not devoted to the production of costly articles of trade but rather to

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[49]This report is in the Danish State Archives, Vestindisk-guineisk Rente samt Generaltoldkammer, under the title heading "Det engelske Parlaments Forhandlinger ang. Slavers Transport til Vestindien," a detailed compilation of testimony on the slave trade taken in 1788 concerning the Dolben Bill and in 1788-89 before a committee of the Privy Council appointed to obtain data on the slave trade.

[50]Allerunterthänigste Vorstellung, p. 6.

the production of only the most necessary subsistence articles [Nahrungsbedurfnisse] in what is usually a very fertile soil, is hardly as exhausting [schwerlich so drükkend ist] as in the colonies in America." African chieftains sometimes sell their own subjects into slavery in exchange for liquor, even going so far as to set fire to villages at night and seize the fleeing inhabitants for sale as slaves. "That the slave trade with the Europeans is responsible for a situation in Africa in which the seed of morality and humane behavior must be destroyed is difficult to deny."[51]

Many slaves purchased by Europeans in Africa are not slaves at all but prisoners of war. Though defenders of the trade argue that these prisoners would be executed if they were not sold as slaves on the coast, many witnesses acquainted with the practices of the African tribes state that wars are frequently started for the sole purpose of obtaining slaves for sale to the Europeans. "Thus we have another consequence of the trade which can have only a baleful influence on the destiny of Africa . . . it is difficult to comprehend how the areas where such warfare is most common avoid becoming depopulated."[52]

Criminals are another source of slaves, and the sale of criminals as slaves to Europeans "perhaps . . . provides the opportunity for the greatest cruelty and injustice. There is little doubt . . . that transgressions which previously could be paid off

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[51] Ibid., pp. 7-8.

[52] Ibid., p. 9.

with a small fine . . . are now punished with enslavement."[53]

The committee concluded that the European presence on the coast of Africa had had only "the most evil consequences for Africa":

> Africans have learned of needs [Bedürfnisse] and luxuries of which they previously knew nothing; the Europeans have taught the Africans to satisfy these wants at the cost of every feeling of humanity and morality; we have taught them to use our weapons, so that they could make war with greater success and procure a great number of prisoners. On the other hand, we Europeans have kept the Africans in ignorance of all the things which could have been truly useful to them. We have done nothing with regard to exporting useful knowledge to these peoples--who are surely not unfit for a certain amount of civilization. The Europeans have not taught the Africans living in areas where the soil is extremely fertile to grow crops which would enable them to engage in a trade which would have to become incomparably more important for them than this trade in human beings, this slave trade which tears asunder their bonds of community and spreads mistrust and unrest [Unruhe] among tribes which, with their climate and soil, are so strongly favored by nature. With all of these disadvantages on the one side and absolutely nothing but the selfishness of the Europeans on the other, no more doubt can be allowed concerning the morality of the slave trade. For this reason one cannot possibly maintain that the slave trade is legitimate.[54]

As for the European slave traders and those who buy slaves in America, they cannot plead their innocence by saying they know nothing of how the slaves they buy actually became slaves when, in fact, they are the ones who provide the motive for "the most unlawful, evil deeds" by which more Africans are enslaved.[55]

The committee argued that Africa would clearly benefit if the slave trade were outlawed and quoted testimony by Alexander

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[53] Ibid., p. 10.

[54] Ibid., pp. 10-11. Again, the influence of Schimmelmann's Bedenken is clear.

[55] Ibid., p. 12.

Falconbridge, who had found during his travels along the coast of Africa that the only Africans who suffered when the slave trade was interrupted were those engaged in the slave trade, and that peace and trust had returned when it was interrupted.

> It is thus indisputable that the Europeans are the cause of the crimes of the Africans, crimes the latter commit on account of the slave trade. The crimes of the Africans would cease if the occasion [Gelegenheit] for the crimes were to cease; and when one . . . applies the principles of religion and ethics to the slave trade, then probably no other conclusion can be drawn but that the slave trade . . . is illicit [unerlaubt] and that no other benefit could be important enough to justify the continuation of the slave trade.[56]

Even more immoral than the purchase of slaves in Africa was the Middle Passage. In order to avoid exaggerating its evils, the committee's report cautioned, one had to "set aside all notions and feelings which, because of a refined upbringing . . . would make another condition seem more terrible than if such feelings were absent."

> But whatever standard of human development [Ausbildung] one chooses to presuppose, it is undeniable that it would be difficult to imagine a more miserable physical condition than that in which the Negro slaves find themselves during their transportation from Africa to America. Crowded together and chained in the narrow hold of a ship, they must often during stormy weather spend several days without any access to fresh air and endure an atmosphere which even the European crew members cannot approach without fainting. All day the healthy often remain chained together with the loathesomely ill, the living beside the dead.[57]

The slaves are given only the barest amounts of food and water because, on the slave ships, space is needed to place as many

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[56] Ibid., pp. 12-14.

[57] Ibid., pp. 14-15.

slaves as possible. There are many instances recorded where the slaves, driven by desperation, have sought to free themselves by force, but "even more frequent are the examples of their eagerly seeking an opportunity to throw themselves overboard . . . . It is unnecessary to delve further into these revolting details . . . . What has already been said can suffice as proof that the transport of the slaves is not reconcilable with any feelings of humanity."[58]

Some argue that the Negro is inferior, but this has not been proven; even if it were true, it would not justify the wretched treatment of the slaves during the Middle Passage. The state could perhaps ease the lot of the slave during the journey by means of regulations, but enforcement would be difficult so long as such regulations were contrary to the interests of those conducting the slave trade. The high mortality rate for the slaves during the Middle Passage provides incontestable proof of the disastrous impact of the slave trade on the enslaved Africans:

> When one considers that the slave buyers on the African coast take pains to purchase only healthy persons; that all of these persons are in an age group which in normal circumstances has a mortality rate that is far lower than that of other age groups; and yet that the number of these persons who die in the brief time period of a few months is absolutely out of all proportion to what is normal in other circumstances, . . . no cause for this unnaturally high mortality rate is possible other than the treatment to which the slaves are subjected during the journey to America.[59]

The committee, without giving any source, stated that the

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[58] Ibid., pp. 15-16.

[59] Ibid., pp. 16-18.

"treatment of slaves on Danish ships is acknowledged to be better than on the ships of other nations," but then used data it had gathered to support its contention that slave ships were death traps. Of 17,113 slaves shipped from Africa to America from 1778 through 1789, 2,706 died during the Middle Passage, or fifteen per cent of the total. During the subsequent "seasoning" in the islands, because of illnesses contracted on the ships or the change in climate and way of life, as many if not more died as on the ships:

> Facts such as those presented here require no further comment. They speak for themselves. It is hard to acknowledge, yet even more difficult to dispute, that the border line between such an inevitable sacrifice of human life [as is involved in the slave trade] and actual murder, if the line were to be drawn by an impartial hand, could only be very vague [schwankend].[60]

As a result of their practice over a long period of time, however, abuses such as the slave trade can become so intimately connected with beneficial matters that eradicating the abuses risks destroying practices which are useful, and there is consequently a need for the most careful deliberation before any action is taken:

> This may well be the case with the slave trade and, as much as we, by dint of every moral and humane sentiment, might feel ourselves pressed to recommend most humbly that Your Royal Majesty abolish the slave trade unconditionally [die unbedingte Aufhebung des Negerhandels allerunterthänigst anzurathen], we still have the duty of not failing to investigate carefully the connection between the slave trade and other matters that are important for the state and for the subjects of Your Royal

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[60] Ibid., pp. 18-19.

Majesty, and the consequences which might result from abolition.[61]

The committee therefore dealt in turn with the importance of the slave trade itself for Denmark in comparison with "other branches of commerce" and the influence of the slave trade on "the present and future cultivation of Your Majesty's West Indian colonies." The data indicated that from 1778 through 1789, a total of 17,113 slaves was purchased in Africa by Danish slavers, including 12,062 at the Danish forts, for a yearly average of 1,426 (see Appendix III). The committee took care to note that those years included a war between England and France "which provided the Danish slave trade with an opportunity for expansion which normally is not available." During the years when the slave trade was not affected by the war, Danish slavers carried an annual average of 894 slaves to America; and since the war ended, the Danish slave trade has "receded into its usual rut [Geleis]."[62]

The number of ships used in the trade was proportional to the number of slaves carried, and peaked during the war years and the two immediate post-war years (see Appendix III). Altogether, from 1778 through 1789, Danish slavers made 50 voyages from Africa to the West Indies; only one voyage was made in 1791. Spare slaves at the Danish forts in Africa had been sold recently to French slavers in accordance with agreements with French companies. The

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[61] Ibid., p. 20.

[62] Ibid., pp. 21-22.

committee concluded "there is at present no likelihood that these numbers can be increased."[63]

The committee next analyzed the cargo list of a ship engaged in trade with the Guinea Coast in an attempt to describe the origin of goods used to purchase slaves. The total value of the cargo was 58,336 rigsdaler, with articles valued at 21,415 rigsdaler probably produced in Denmark and the rest of the merchandise, valued at 36,921 rigsdaler, produced abroad. Even if two such cargoes were sent to the Guinea Coast each year, only 42,830 rigsdaler worth of Danish products would be involved.[64]

Experience, the committee noted, has shown that the slave trade itself has "nearly always produced more losses than profits." The royal committee appointed in 1786 to investigate means by which the Guinea trade could be made more profitable had found little hope for improving the situation. The committee had found that, in order to export 1,400 slaves annually, "four forts and three lodges had to be maintained on the Gold Coast with a not inconsiderable number of employees, so that it is easy to perceive that unusually high sales earnings are required in order to defray the extraordinary expenses." Prices for slaves in the Danish islands are low, and even the sale of slaves to the French islands has not brought

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[63] Ibid., pp. 22-23.

[64] Ibid., p. 24. The most valuable items in the cargo studied by the committee were gunpowder, muskets, and brandy, with gunpowder valued at 8,528 rigsdaler, muskets at 6,083 rigsdaler and brandy at 5,506 rigsdaler.

particular benefit to Danish slavers; in fact, "the entrepreneurs of the slave trade are satisfied when they realize . . . quite moderate profits or merely escape without losses."[65]

The committee argued that the effect of the slave trade on Danish shipping was of very slight significance:

> Employment of two or three ships and the sailors needed to man them is, in relation to the totality of Danish shipping, such a small matter that, if it is not to be regarded as quite unimportant, it could nevertheless scarcely be considered significant once a more noble and important interest made its abolition necessary.[66]

As an additional indictment of the slave trade, the committee used Thomas Clarkson's argument that the trade, rather than serving as a nursery for seamen, was actually a graveyard for them. For various reasons, including the long sojourn on the Guinea Coast and disease on the ships, "there are always far more deaths among sailors on slave ships than . . . in normal circumstances."[67] No data from Danish slave ships were used to support this contention.

The committee concluded:

> We can consequently, in view of the points we have examined here, be of no other opinion than that the slave trade in itself cannot be regarded as so important for the state, or for those of Your Majesty's subjects who are immediately involved in it, that its economic importance could be used as an important argument against abolition.[68]

But though the slave trade itself was not important enough

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[65] Ibid., pp. 25-26.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Ibid., pp. 26-27.

[68] Ibid., p. 28.

to provide an argument against abolition, the committee felt there was another matter which might be:

> We come now to the most important and most difficult point of this entire investigation, namely the relation of the slave trade to the West Indian colonies, and the question of whether with respect to the colonies it would be possible and feasible to abolish the slave trade.[69]

The committee believed that, without recourse to the slave trade in the past, the West Indian islands would have been poorly developed and that slavery as it now existed had to be accepted as "the established and customary system of cultivation" which "cannot yet be abolished."

> No matter how desirable it would be to attain the goal of soon freeing the slaves [So wünschenswerth es seyn würde den Zwek den Befreiung der Neger bald zu erreichen][70] and as much as we are convinced that this distant but, at some future time, possible goal must not be lost from view in all arrangements which are made with regard to the slaves [und so sehr wir überzeugt sind, dass dieser entfernte aber dereinst mögliche Zwek bei allen Veranstaltungen, die in Absicht der Neger getroffen werden, nicht aus dem Gesicht verloren werden müsse[71]] yet we are also fully convinced that emancipation is absolutely not a matter to be dealt with at present, and that each incautious regulation could bring on very dangerous consequences [so sind wir doch auch völlig überzeugt, dass das durchaus keine Sache des Augenbliks seyn, und dass jede unvorsichtige Masregel sehr gefährliche Folgen veranlassen könne].[72]

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[69] Ibid., pp. 28-29.

[70] Ibid., pp. 29-30. The word "soon" [bald] was deleted from the Danish translation of the report published by Kirstein in Minerva, April 1792, p. 56. This was first noted by C.A. Trier in his article "Det dansk-vestindiske Negerinfdørselsforbud af 1792," Historisk Tidsskrift, 7th Series, V (1904), 430.

[71] This statement also was deleted from the version published in Danish in Minerva. The committee apparently feared that the language used on the subject of emancipation in its original report was too strong and that, since emancipation was not deemed feasible anyway, broaching the subject would serve only to frighten persons who could accept abolition of the slave trade but not emancipation.

[72] Allerunterthänigste Vorstellung, pp. 29-30.

The committee believed that a long period would be needed in which to prepare the slaves for freedom:

> Before a class of people which for so many years has lived in a state of unconditional slavery can be liberated from forcible subjection to their masters [gegen die Gewaltätigkeiten ihrer Herren[73]] and placed under the protection of public laws, it is absolutely necessary that they possess a certain level of knowledge [Kenntnisse] and morality which, among the Negro slaves, cannot be assumed to exist at the present time. The education of the slaves must precede their emancipation, for otherwise their own well-being and the well-being of their masters will be jeopardized [Ihre Erziehung muss ihrer Befreiung vorangehen, sonst wird ihr eigenes Wohl und das Wohl ihrer Herren aufs Spiel gesezt]. A premature and rash measure could easily carry them to the point where they would choose to obtain by violent means that which must still be withheld from them; and with their numerical preponderance over the white inhabitants of the colonies, perhaps only a few bold and clever leaders would be required to put into execution such a plan and to bring it to fruition.[74]

The committee thus postponed consideration of emancipation on grounds that the slaves were not yet ready for freedom and that talk of emancipation might spark a major slave revolt.[75]

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[73]This phrase too was left out of the Danish version published in Minerva, p. 56.

[74]Allerunterthänigste Vorstellung, pp. 30-31. The thinking of M. Frossard was probably of influence here, as his book was one of the sources used by the committee. After strongly condemning slavery as an odious tyranny that violated the rights of man ("L'esclavage est l'infraction la plus criminelle des droits de l'homme et du citoyen, la tyrannie la plus odieuse, l'attentat le plus reprehensible."), Frossard stated that "L'affranchissement général des nègres est un projet sublime dans la theorie. Mais son execution n'est possible que graduellement . . . . Il faut un siècle de bonnes actions pour corriger trois siècles de tyrannie." See his La Cause des esclaves nègres et des habitants de la Guinée (Lyon, 1789), pp. 20-21.

[75]The slaves in the Danish West Indies were not emancipated until July 3, 1848, and then only when they threatened to destroy St. Croix.

But emancipation was not the real issue confronting the committee. Rather, its problem was to find a means to end the slave trade--a type of commerce that was both unprofitable and immoral--yet maintain an adequate slave labor force in the colonies so that sugar production would not suffer:

> If it were possible to place the slaves who are presently in the islands, or who would be present there after the passage of a certain number of years, in a condition that would enable them--as other peoples living under civilized conditions [gesellschaftlicher Verfassung]--not only to maintain their population but to increase it, all new importations would become unnecessary and would cease spontaneously . . . . The careful examination of this possibility has had to be one of the principal objects of our investigation.[76]

The committee noted that, in Africa, Negroes reproduced as well if not better than people elsewhere. And "It is an indisputable truth that Negro females in the West Indies, when living in regular conjugal relationships [ordentlicher ehelicher Verbindung], are very fertile . . . ."[77] Therefore, when one finds that "hitherto no regular and adequate propagation has occurred among the slaves in the West Indian colonies of all nations, one can seek the reason for this solely in their circumstances and condition in the colonies."[78]

The Danish West Indies, the report stated, have been just as dependent on the slave trade as have other West Indian colonies, with the slave population declining whenever the slave trade has been

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[76]Allerunterthänigste Vorstellung, pp. 31-32.

[77]Ibid. Oldendorp, another source used by the committee, had written about the high fertility rate of the slaves. See his Geschichte der Mission der evangelischen Brüder, I, 407.

[78]Allerunterthänigste Vorstellung, pp. 32-33.

interrupted. The committee, after detailed study of the population problem, had concluded that a low birth rate rather than a high death rate was largely responsible for the natural decrease of the slave population. Having obtained from the General Customs Department a list of all slaves on St. Croix during eleven consecutive years, together with the number of births and deaths for each year, the committee found that the average number of deaths annually was 776, the average number of births 432. There was one death for every twenty-eight slaves and one birth for every fifty-one--a crude death rate of 35.7 and a crude birth rate of 19.6.[79]

The committee used data on birth and death rates in Europe to show that the death rate among the slaves on St. Croix was not abnormally high but that the birth rate was unusually low; it said deaths could be reduced by better care of young children and sick persons, and by checking the spread of epidemics. The latter was especially important: in 1784 only 485 slaves died, but in 1782, 1,118 died and in 1783, 983; each of these years saw epidemic outbreaks of smallpox and measles. In 1789, another year in which there was an epidemic, 1,278 slaves died. During the eight years in which there were no epidemics, deaths averaged 644 per year, or one death for every thirty-four slaves (a crude death rate of 29.4).[80]

The committee suggested that it was unlikely that three years out of every eleven would witness epidemics, but quite probable

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[79] Ibid., p. 33. See Appendix VII.

[80] Ibid., pp. 34-35.

that there would be one or two such years per decade; therefore it combined the death rate which included the three years when there had been epidemics with the average death rate for the eight years in which no epidemics had occurred to obtain a rate judged to be more realistic, in this case one death for every thirty-one slaves (a crude death rate of 32.3).[81]

The committee commented on the peculiar age structure of the slave population, with its low ratio of children to adults (a result of importing primarily adult slaves), and noted that the death rate for young children was in normal circumstances much higher than for adults.

> It appears therefore to follow that the mortality rate for adult slaves must be much greater than is normal and that, if the number of children were in the proper ratio to adults, the slaves' mortality rate in its entirety would prove to be more disadvantageous than the calculations above indicated. We believe it must be admitted that in fact such a high death rate among adult slaves does occur, but we believe also there is ample reason for believing that it is partly due to the high mortality rate among slaves recently imported from Africa. This notwithstanding, it appears to us still possible to assume that the current mortality rate on St. Croix could, by means of some suitable arrangements, easily be lowered to the extent that it would not stand in the way of the goal of having the slave population become self-sustaining, thereby obviating the need for continued dependence on the slave trade.[82]

A much more difficult problem than the death rate, according to the committee, was presented by the low birth rate among the slaves. In a normal society there would be an excess of births over deaths,

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[81] Ibid., p. 36.

[82] Ibid., pp. 36-37.

except during periods when extraordinary circumstances intervened, but the Negro slaves did not live under normal social conditions. Would it be possible to improve their living standards so that, "except for the matter of their lack of personal freedom," they could "enjoy approximately the same advantages as mankind in general?"

> The slaves have always been regarded merely as tools [Werkzeuge]; people have even made the abominable computation [den abscheulichen Calcul] as to whether it is more profitable to let the slaves work moderately hard and thereby maintain their lives and usefulness for a longer period, or to strain them to the utmost of their powers and, when they die from their suffering, to purchase new slaves. For so long as such a computation is possible, it is difficult to imagine that anything can be done in order to bring about natural propagation and multiplication among the slaves. Experience also indicates that the planters in general have always had in view only their immediate benefit and have opposed everything which did not promote their immediate gain. Thus in purchasing slaves their chief aim has been to acquire male slaves because they could expect more work from them than from female slaves; this has resulted in a numerical imbalance between the sexes, wherein lies indisputably the principal reason for the small number of births.[83]

The committee had secured lists of slaves on those St. Croix and St. Thomas plantations which were mortgaged to the Danish Crown and discovered that the ratio of male to female slaves on the St. Croix plantations was 100:86. On the plantations on St. Thomas, however, the ratio was 100:94.6.[84]

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[83] Ibid., pp. 37-39.

[84] Ibid., p. 39. These differing ratios of male to female slaves surely derived from the fact that St. Croix was a much more recently developed island than St. Thomas, and therefore its slave population was more strongly influenced by the African slave trade, which supplied more male slaves than female.

The committee relied on very limited data in reaching its conclusion that there was a major imbalance between the sexes, a conclusion later shown to be without basis; its fear of involving the West Indian government, and thereby the planters through their burger councils, restricted its access to information on the slave population. It is indeed remarkable that Schimmelmann accepted this erroneous view of the ratio of male to female slaves; he should have known from the yearly reports sent to him from the islands that his plantations, La Princesse and LaGrange on St. Croix, Caroline on St. John, and Thomas on St. Thomas, possessed in 1792 a decided preponderance of female slaves among their adult population--309 females to 258 males, with the largest plantation, La Princesse, having 139 adult female slaves and only 99 adult male slaves.[85]

In addition to the disproportionate number of males in the slave population, the committee believed there were other factors detrimental to a higher birth rate. One of these was the lack of attention given to promoting slave marriages:

> The indifference towards almost everything which could have influence on improving the living conditions of the slaves has been extended to include slave marriages. Slave marriages have in general not been hindered, but nothing has been done to encourage them, when one considers how difficult it must be for people living as Negro slaves, in their suffering, to join together in marriage.[86]

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[85]DSA, Grev Ernst Schimmelmanns Privatarkiv. Pk. 72. Fideikommisset vedkommende Papirer, 1782-1800, Vortrag zur Generalversammlung den 1 May, 1794, p. 4. Slave population of the Schimmelmann plantations as of October, 1792.

[86]Allerunterthänigste Vorstellung, p. 40.

The committee argued that planters, in breaking up slave marriages by selling one of the partners or in destroying slave families by separating children from their parents, actually discouraged the formation of slave marriages and thereby impeded the growth of the slave population.[87] Because the slaves know that there is no guarantee the families they form will not be broken up by the masters, they tend to suppress their inclination toward forming stable family units and live promiscuously instead. The whites contribute to the slaves' promiscuous behavior when they "unscrupulously use slave women, without considering the personal situation of the women, for the satisfaction of their own (because of the warm climate) passionate needs, as they would use the women for any other service."[88]

There were other factors, besides the low birth rate, which harmed the growth of the slave population:

> The constant, exclusive goal of immediate profits results in too little care being devoted to women during pregnancy and after delivery, as well as to the children in their earliest years. It is true that now on most plantations pregnant women, in the period immediately preceding delivery, are spared a certain amount of work, but this practice is still too arbitrary and imperfect to have much effect . . . , especially when this better treatment is not extended to the children.[89]

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[87] Ibid., p. 41. The committee told of a recent incident in which a slave boy had been taken from his mother and sold to another plantation; the woman had committed suicide.

[88] Ibid., pp. 42-43. Promiscuity abetted the spread of venereal disease, which often left its victims sterile, and was thought to reduce the care and attention slave mothers gave to their infants by different or unknown fathers.

[89] Ibid., p. 43.

When the mother is compelled to return to work in the fields a few months after giving birth, her baby is denied the care it needs at such an early age. The mother must take her child with her into the fields where, while she works, it lies "with a piece of sugar cane in its mouth" and is subjected to the bites of insects. If there should be an old slave woman available who cannot be used for any other kind of work, she is assigned the task of looking after the young children, though this is still not as effective as having the children's mothers look after them. "It is only natural that the health of the children suffers from such treatment and is often ruined for the rest of their lives."[90]

Another factor which the committee believed inhibited population growth was the large number of house slaves. These slaves had become a customary symbol of success for the planters, and some planters maintained as many as fifty of them. House slaves generally remained unmarried, and because there were so many of them the number of slave births was believed to be lower than it would otherwise have been.[91]

The committee believed the various hindrances to population growth mentioned above were correctable weaknesses in the slave system and could be solved, some immediately, others gradually, "if . . . laws and morals were to lend a mutual helping hand to such a

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[90] Ibid., pp. 43-44.

[91] Ibid., pp. 44-45.

noble and useful purpose [einem so edlen und nützlichen Zwekke]." Data had been collected which, though rather incomplete, could nevertheless be of value. Two tables accompanying the committee's report provided a list of slaves on the four Schimmelmann family plantations for the years 1773-1782. (See Appendix VIII.) The tables showed that on these plantations the slave death rate was approximately the same as on St. Croix as a whole, namely one death a year for every twenty-seven slaves (a crude rate of 35.2 per 1,000). But on the other hand the Schimmelmann plantations had a much higher rate of slave births--one for every thirty-five slaves, or a crude birth rate of 28.5 per 1,000. The ratio of male to female slaves was 100:90, a disproportion which the committee considered the primary reason for the excess of deaths over births. "In any case these facts provide a strong basis for the probability of our earlier proposition that the present small number of births is the result of adventitious circumstances," the removal of which would end the natural decrease of the slave population.[92]

The committee had failed to obtain further examples of birth and death rates on the Danish islands, but believed data found in works describing the situation on other West Indian islands could be instructive. Clarkson had described more than half a dozen instances in which plantations on Jamaica had been able to increase their slave populations solely by humane treatment of the slaves and by encourage-

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[92] Ibid., pp. 45-47. The ratio of male to female slaves on the Schimmelmann plantations had changed dramatically by 1792. See above, p. 106.

ment given the slaves to propagate. Clarkson had noted other islands, including St. Kitts, Antigua, Barbados, and St. Domingue, on which an excess of births over deaths had occurred on some plantations. Clarkson had also referred to plantations where the slave population declined dramatically when a new, harsh master took over. The committee also used examples provided by Frossard of how good treatment of slaves in the French West Indies had ended or almost ended dependence on the slave trade on some plantations there.[93]

The committee concluded that in the proper circumstances the slaves were capable of maintaining and even increasing their population by natural means. The task remained of determining the precise measures by which obstacles which hindered the natural increase of the slaves in the Danish West Indies could be removed in order to end the islands' dependence on the slave trade; normally one would first investigate how this might be accomplished before deciding that the slave trade should be abolished:

> But, since we consider abolition of the slave trade to be itself a means of promoting, of its own accord, the propagation of the slaves, we must most humbly request permission here . . . at least to presume that Your Royal Majesty will deign most graciously to abolish the slave trade irrevocably and to tolerate the continuation of the slave trade only for a stipulated period of perhaps ten more years.[94]

The committee believed it imperative that the Crown should announce its intent to abolish the trade:

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[93] Ibid., pp. 47-50. The committee was using Clarkson's Essay on the Impolicy of the Slave Trade (London, 1788), and Frossard's La cause des esclaves nègres.

[94] Allerunterthänigste Vorstellung, pp. 51-52.

> As soon as such a law is made public, one can anticipate that the plantation owners will begin thinking spontaneously of the means they might use to enable themselves to preserve a plantation population which is an indispensable necessity for the benefit of the planters themselves, so that the success of the matter could well nigh be left to the planters; but this, however, we dare not do, since experience has often shown that people can also be insufficiently enlightened as to their own self-interest to be able to surmount antiquated prejudices [verjährte Vorurtheile] and to proceed with a change in procedures to which they have been accustomed for a long time. Moreover, it might develop in this instance that the necessary arrangements require a cash advance which not all plantation owners could obtain; hence, financial aid for them might be found necessary and feasible.[95]

The committee noted that the slave population on St. Croix from 1780 through 1790 ranged between 21,000 and just under 23,000 (see Appendix VIII), and during the decade the slave population declined by 562. The planters had not appeared eager to buy more slaves and would probably content themselves with the smallest number needed to get by:

> We cannot accept the present slave population of St. Croix as a sufficient basis on which the completed population could be founded; even the disproportion between male and female slaves stands in the way of this. One must at least take into account the need to procure approximately as many slaves as are necessary to bring about a proper ratio of male to female slaves; and since there might be many individual plantation owners who are more than casually interested in stocking their plantations with new slaves, it would be a hard blow to them if they were suddenly deprived of the hope of being able to save their fortunes from ruin by purchasing fresh slaves. There would also be complaints from the well-to-do planters if they were suddenly denied all opportunity for making improvements, which they had the intention and means of carrying out, to their property. On these grounds we have decided that, from the time when the irrevocable decision to abolish the slave trade is made, there ought to be a ten-year toleration of the trade. Such a policy . . . would give the planters an opportunity, according to their circumstances and plans, of furnishing

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[95] Ibid., pp. 52-53.

> themselves with as many slaves as they desire and are capable of obtaining. In order to provide the planters with every possible alleviation [Erleichterung], it would in our most humble opinion be advisable during the proposed ten-year period [prior to abolition of the slave trade] to permit an unrestricted importation of slaves . . . and also to allow foreign vessels, in exchange for each slave they sell in the Danish islands, to take out of the Danish colonies a certain amount of sugar. We maintain that such an unrestricted importation is all the more necessary, as even now the complaints of the West Indian planters over the small number of slaves supplied by the entrepreneurs of the Baltic Company [de Coninck's company] are very common.[96]

The committee referred to the number of slaves sold in the Danish islands from 1778 through 1789 to indicate that the planters did have reason to complain. The number of slaves purchased by planters in the Danish islands had declined:

1778	908
1779	979
1780	438
1781	1,229
1782	192
1783	629
1784	305
1785	115
1786	406
1787	492
1788	249
1789	287
	6,229

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[96] Ibid., pp. 53-56.

Low prices for slaves in the Danish islands were considered by the Baltic Company as the reason for the declining numbers of slaves sold there, for the planters were willing to pay only prices that were too low to allow for a profit.[97]

The committee decided that unrestricted competition both for slave ships seeking to sell slaves in the Danish West Indies and for planters wishing to buy slaves was the best solution to the problem of supplying the islands with more slaves quickly. The planters who lacked the resources needed to purchase enough slaves for their plantations should be aided by the Crown in order to ensure the success of the plan for abolition; the planters should be "allowed to entertain hopes of receiving some benefit through the benevolence of Your Royal Majesty."[98]

The committee estimated that during the last ten years of the slave trade to the Danish West Indies, the Crown would have to assist needy planters in purchasing an average of 600 slaves a year. If each slave cost 200 rigsdaler, a yearly sum of 120,000 rigsdaler would have to be made available for that purpose, amounting to 1,200,000 rigsdaler over the ten-year period. Detailed proposals for the loans to the planters should be drawn up in the West Indies under

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[97] Ibid., p. 57. Yet if the demand for slaves in the Danish West Indies really had been strong, the planters would have been willing to pay more for African slaves. The local planters wanted more slaves, but did not need them so badly that they were willing to pay competitive prices.

[98] Ibid., p. 58. Obviously, this would undercut any resistance to abolition by the planters, as would the ten-year postponement of abolition.

the supervision of the burger councils on each of the islands, and in Denmark direction of the loans should be entrusted to the Commission for the Liquidation of the West Indian Debt.[99] Security for the loans would be provided first and foremost by a mortgage on those slaves bought with the loans and if necessary on other property owned by the planters. For planters who were unable to provide sufficient security for the loans they wanted, the committee believed that appropriate supervision could keep the risk at a low level. "And should it prove impossible [for the Danish government] to avoid some losses, the noble and great purpose [of the loans] could probably justify a small sacrifice."[100]

Because the loans were intended to serve primarily as a means of improving the productive capacity of the plantations, the committee emphasized that the planters must not be allowed to neglect the slaves already present in the islands. Slaves bought with the loan should increase the population of the plantations, not merely maintain it.[101]

The committee also wanted the burger councils to see to it that those planters on whose plantations the male population was disproportionately large used the loan to purchase more female slaves

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[99] Ibid., p. 59. This commission had been created in 1786 to administer collection of the debts owed the Crown by various planters after the Crown had bought from Dutch bankers the mortgages they held on plantations in the Danish islands.

[100] Ibid., pp. 59-60.

[101] Ibid., pp. 62-63.

in order to raise the birth rate. For those planters who did not need to use the loan fund to buy slaves, self-interest alone should dictate an emphasis on acquiring more female slaves. No law could force them to do so, but "We believe that an arrangement could be devised whereby the head tax [Kopfschatze] could be used in pursuit of the goal of increasing the proportion of female slaves." The committee recommended removing the head tax on adult female slaves and doubling the head tax on male slaves over twelve years of age. To allow the planters time to prepare for this change and to acquire more female slaves, a period of three years should elapse following publication of this regulation before it would be enforced. This measure would provide another motive for the planters to look after their own future interests.[102]

The large number of house slaves was considered another hindrance to population growth which the committee believed could be dealt with by imposing a special head tax. Revenue from this tax should be set aside for distribution as bonuses to planters who did most to promote slave marriages and the growth of the slave population.[103]

The remaining serious obstacles to population growth, the committee thought, were based on the fact that the blacks were enslaved, totally at the mercy of their masters. This made it impossible for the slaves to do anything themselves to improve

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[102] Ibid., pp. 64-66.

[103] Ibid., pp. 66-67.

their condition--for them "there remains nothing but blind obedience to the will of another." The slaves cannot be emancipated: "In the present set of circumstances [that] can only be prepared for, not actually brought about immediately by means of laws." Therefore the best way of improving the treatment of slaves was by appealing to the planters' self-interest: "This route to the goal [of helping the slaves] will have to be taken, for so long as the good-will of the planters is not involved in the matter, their unwillingness or even their insubordination will necessarily make everything precarious."[104]

Hitherto, the committee said, the planters have thought that every step towards improving the spiritual level of the slaves or bettering their condition would endanger the security of the white inhabitants of the islands. This fear, which has led the planters to refuse to accept proposals for improving the living conditions and moral standards of the slaves, was the result of the whites' being outnumbered ten to one. The recent rebellion on St. Domingue could only increase the fears and prejudices of the whites. Yet, the committee argued, the planters were mistaken in believing that harsh treatment was a deterrent to slave revolts:

> It is a principle derived from nature and the experiences of history that, the more harshly people are oppressed, the more active must be their desire to throw off their yoke and the more terrible the explosion when they undertake to accomplish this goal, which they will do as soon as they find an opportunity.[105]

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[104] Ibid., pp. 68-70.

[105] Ibid., pp. 70-71.

The proposition that it is less dangerous for the planters to treat their slaves well than to oppose measures that would help the slaves was also borne out by the events which usually occurred during a slave rising:

> Always during such rebellions the whites, and especially the slave masters, are persecuted with the greatest rage by the slaves, and only those whites who had been noted for treating their slaves particularly well are exempted [from harm], which fact also provides a curious proof that the slaves are by no means insensible to feelings of decency and humanity . . . . The slave must be inclined to make use of every opportunity for a rising, so long as he has everything to gain by doing so and extremely little to lose. The bonds which tie the slave to the human community are . . . so weak that their rending asunder can cost the slave's heart very little . . . .[106]

Improving the treatment of slaves would help the planters combat the threat of revolt:

> When the external circumstances of the slave's existence are softened; when, at least for a start, the slave's marriage and his entire domestic life are protected; when the slave is given universal permission and opportunity to acquire something of his own; when the prospect is thereby opened to him of some day obtaining freedom for himself or his children; then all of those things will provide so many bonds that the slave's inclination to tear himself away from his situation will be resisted. The more he has to lose, the less willing he will be to risk rebellion.[107]

Reforms which gave the slaves hope for the future were one

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[106] Ibid., pp. 71-72.

[107] Ibid., pp. 72-73. Of course in practice the slaves were permitted to sell produce from their garden plots and acquire money to buy goods in the towns or to buy their freedom. Oldendorp wrote that he knew a Negro who had purchased his own freedom and that of his two wives, and mentioned the practice whereby a slave could make a down payment on his freedom and obtain conditional release, so that he could move to one of the towns to earn the money needed to purchase his full freedom. See his Geschichte der Mission der evangelischen Brüder, I, 402.

way of reducing the danger of insurrection, the committee stated. Another means of achieving the same goal was to abolish the slave trade:

> Without doubt the danger of slave rebellion would be very greatly reduced if, as a result of the abolition of the slave trade, the day should come when all the slaves in the West Indies have been born there and no more slaves arrive from Africa. Slaves from Africa, who have been snatched away from their fatherland and deprived of all their family connections, and then subjected to atrocious treatment during the Middle Passage, are certain to be much more inclined to attempt a desperate rising than those slaves born in the West Indies, living in a family unit which they value highly, and acquainted with no better living conditions from their own experience.[108]

The committee was highly sensitive about the rights of property, including property in human beings, and was hesitant on the subject of having the Danish government enact laws that would interfere with the slaveholders' control of their slaves. The committee insisted again that by treating their slaves well, "the whites are bound to bring about a security of life for themselves based on love and trust, which is incomparably more productive than controlling the slaves only by force." The committee could either recommend attempting to persuade the planters to improve the treatment of their slaves or trying to compel the planters to do

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[108]Allerunterthänigste Vorstellung, p. 73. An undated document in Kirstein's handwriting, obviously used during the committee's deliberations, stated that the general opinion of writers acquainted with the West Indies was that slaves born in the islands "were a better race of people than those brought from Africa [eine bessere Race von Menschen sind als die aus Africa gekommen]." Oldendorp, Frossard, and E. Long, History of Jamaica (3 vols; London, 1774) were used as sources. Kirstein added that slaves from Africa were described as "filled with hate for the whites" and the prime agents of insurrection, while creole slaves frequently assisted their masters in uncovering plots and quelling revolts.

so by means of legal restrictions. After urging that the Crown issue ordinances which, though not legally binding, would admonish the planters to adopt a policy of amelioration, the committee suggested that perhaps "regulations having the force of law [geseztliche Anordnungen]" would have to be issued to provide some protection for the slaves. Yet the committee tried to avoid giving the impression that it wanted to interfere with the property rights of the slaveholders:

> Of course we have not, in considering the need for regulations, lost sight of the fundamental principle that the slaves are still to be regarded as the lawful property of their masters, and therefore anything that appears to be an attack on the planters' property rights must be avoided; but, . . . as it is incontestably within the realm of the legislating power to direct every use of property in such a manner that no detriment for society as a whole [das ganze der Gesellschaft] arises therefrom, . . . there can be even less dispute about adopting regulations which serve the common good and do not interfere with the legitimate use of property.[109]

The committee proceeded to discuss the various areas in which, for the good of society, the state might decide to interfere with the property rights of the planters. In keeping with the committee's deep concern for population growth, the matter of improving the moral behavior of the slaves (that is, reducing promiscuity) was dealt with first:

> In order to liberate the slaves from this lack of morality and to accustom them to a regular and proper life, we believe that nothing could be as effective as general instruction [allgemeiner Unterricht] in the Christian religion. If this instruction is done properly and makes an impression, the consequences, even for the daily life of the slaves, could be

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[109]Allerunterthänigste Vorstellung, pp. 74-75.

> nothing other than extremely beneficial. For that reason it would be very desirable that the islands be divided into districts which would constitute slave congregations, with a house, in which religious instruction and services could be held, built for each congregation, to which a man would be appointed who, either as a minister or schoolmaster, would attend to the instruction of the slaves.[110]

The committee recommended assisting the Moravian Brothers, partly as a means of reducing the costs of the instructional program, and partly because "their doctrine is perhaps the most suitable and comforting for the slaves in the Negroes' present condition [ihr Lehre ist vielleicht die passendste und tröstlichste für die jetzigen Zustand der Neger]." Indeed, the teachings of the Moravians could be of positive benefit in controlling the slaves and making them content with their present circumstances:

> The indifference towards all earthly tribulations, the constant references to a better situation in the future and to the purity of the heart which the Moravians inculcate in the slaves are direct moral precepts. The slaves are led to feel less dissatisfied with their fate and thereby adjust better to the course of their lives.[111]

The strong emphasis on the role of the Moravians as agents of control over the slaves suggests that the committee's interest in an obedient labor force was perhaps as great as its desire to reduce immorality among the pagan blacks.

The Moravians have given ample proof of the efficacy of their instructions, overcoming all obstacles, including those for which the slaveholders were responsible, and have had several

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[110] Ibid., pp. 75-76.

[111] Ibid., pp. 76-77.

thousand slaves in their congregations for years. "The masters have at last had to acknowledge that their Christian slaves are their best slaves, so that in recent years the obstacles placed in the way of the Moravians by the masters have been fewer." The slaves were very receptive to the appeal of Christianity: they often sought instruction in religion when their day's work was done and were willing to travel considerable distances to attend their classes. The Moravians dealt with the slaves in a sincere, brotherly manner which apparently made an excellent impression on the slaves; "it is worth noting here that this quite brotherly association [of white Moravians and slaves] . . . has never had any evil consequences, which says much about the argument that the slaves must be kept constantly at a great distance from the whites."[112]

The committee proceeded to make a bold suggestion, one which if carried out would involve government interference with the operation of the plantations: the slaves' teachers, it proposed, might serve as protectors of the slaves. The slaves could confide their grievances to the teachers, who would then convey the complaints to the planters in an attempt to resolve them. Most importantly, the teachers would have authority to decide on the best manner of instructing the slaves, and the planters would be forbidden from interfering with the teachers. Another recommendation of the

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[112] Ibid., pp. 77-78.

committee which involved interfering with the power of the planters over their slaves was a proposal that all slave children under six years of age and all new-born babies be baptized and reared in the Christian religion, without regard to whether their parents were Christian or pagan.[113]

In an attempt to regularize the sexual unions of the slaves, the committee urged that slave marriages be registered in a book to be kept by the teacher to whose congregation the slaves belonged. But the marriages would be registered only after the planters had given permission to the slaves to marry. Divorce could be obtained if one partner demanded it, and divorces, too, were to be registered, so that "no abrogation of a marriage could occur without the prior knowledge of the master or the overseer of the plantation and the teacher of the congregation." The committee insisted that the planter or overseer on each plantation had the duty of watching closely to see that no male slave lived with a female in a "permanent, intimate association [beständigen vertrauten Umgange]" without a formal registration of their union, and that no marriage was ended without the slaves' giving proper notice.[114] The committee's grasp of plantation realities was clearly deficient. The committee consisted of persons well read on the slave trade and slavery, but no member of the committee had ever visited the West Indies.

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[113] Ibid., pp. 78-79.

[114] Ibid., pp. 79-81.

The committee believed that once the slave trade was abolished, the planters would have every reason to promote slave marriages and would certainly do nothing to restrain regular marital unions among their slaves. The committee, even so, favored providing legal protection for slave marriages "to the extent that an entirely arbitrary separation of married slaves by their master would not be permitted." The masters at present, the report continued, readily accepted slave marriages, and Christian slaves were taught that such unions were inviolable:

> How then is this concept supposed to be reconciled with the fact that a Christian slave master, thinking only of his own gain, can separate his married slaves and sell them as he chooses? A law banning the separation of married couples seems to us, therefore, to be a natural consequence of permission to marry, and we are of the opinion that, with regard to slaves who live on the same plantation under the same master, slave marriages could be guaranteed unconditionally. The matter becomes more difficult with regard to married slaves living on different plantations. Nevertheless, since these unions too can occur only with the permission of the masters, it appears to us that it would not be unfair if these married partners too were guaranteed against being arbitrarily separated by their masters, at least for so long as the masters, whose permission they obtained to get married, . . . remained alive and in ownership of the plantations.[115]

In cases where bankruptcies make it difficult to keep married slaves together on the same plantation, the problem of avoiding the separation of married slaves could perhaps be overcome by granting the planter who purchases one of the married slaves the first chance to buy the slave's marital partner. "But it would be much better if

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[115] Ibid., pp. 81-82. To enact such a law, of course, would represent interference with the property rights of the planters, and its enforcement, accordingly, would be difficult.

it were decreed that the owner of the wife . . . would always have to buy the male partner at his appraised value [Taxations-Preise]."[116]

The committee noted that the slaves, according to all reports, were very fond of their children and said the threat that they would be separated from their children probably acted as a deterrent to marriages. Therefore, the committee proposed that slave children be allowed to stay with their parents until they were at least six years old and, local conditions permitting, the age limit could perhaps be raised.

> The harshness involved in removing a very young [unerzogenes] child from the care of his parents is so striking that it would be difficult for anyone to deny the justice of a law which at least guaranteed the slaves the possession of their children to a certain age.[117]

With regard to the feeding and clothing of slaves, the committee believed no laws to help the slaves were feasible. "We believe these matters must be counted among those for which, because of the difficulties of control, legal regulations are virtually impossible."[118] The committee thus admitted that so long

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[116] Ibid., p. 83. Evidence of just how common it was for married slaves to live on separate plantations is provided by the lists of married slaves attending the Moravian missions at Friedensthal and Fridensburg on St. Croix. See Appendix IX. That slaves frequently traveled from one plantation to another at night is attested to by Governor-General Walterstorff in a report of September 21, 1792, pp. 7-8: "Such night visits [Natte Besøg] are the slaves' greatest desire . . . . The planter who tried to keep his slaves (if it were possible, which it is not) from visiting their wives and husbands at night would make himself more hated than the worst tyrant."

[117] Allerunterthänigste Vorstellung, pp. 83-84.

[118] Ibid., p. 85.

as the planters exercised unrestricted property rights over their slaves, amelioration would depend on the cooperation of the slaveholders. In view of this, it seems peculiar that the committee believed that the Crown could compel the planters to allow teachers to go onto the plantations to listen to the slaves' grievances and serve as mediators between the slaves and the planters, and that it felt laws against the separate sale of married slaves and the separation of young children from their parents could be enforced.

In its deliberations, the committee said, it had been necessary to assume that the slaves were totally subjected to their masters, "but we have at the same time pointed out that we have not excluded the possibility of a future change in a situation which deserves more detailed discussion." The committee then asked the Crown to confine the activities of another committee, which had been given the task of preparing a slave code for the Danish islands, to criminal law only and "to leave to us all matters relating to the state [Verfassung] of the slaves and the free colored."[119] Evidently the committee feared that if a stringent slave code were drawn up, opportunities for improving the slaves' treatment and preparing them for eventual emancipation would be restricted. In fact no slave code was ever finished.

The committee next considered the ways in which the slave trade was connected with the cultivation of the West Indies in an

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[119] Ibid., pp. 86-87.

effort to determine the benefits the planters derived from the importation of slaves and whether such benefits were so important that heavy losses to the planters would result from abolition of the slave trade. After calculating the cost of buying slaves and the returns that could be expected from such investments, the committee argued that "the benefit the planters derive from newly purchased slaves is very slight or perhaps nonexistent."[120]

It would be much more advantageous for the planters, the committee said, if the slave population on the plantations could be maintained by natural means. The cost of providing for slave children in their earliest years was small; and as the children grew older, they could be used for a variety of tasks, such as gathering hay by the time they were six, so that the planter got some material benefit from feeding and clothing them. Though the committee said it was impossible to discover precisely how much it cost to raise a slave on a plantation, "We feel certain that such a slave will be . . . considerably cheaper than one purchased by means of the slave trade."[121] As the price of new slaves continued to increase, it would become ever more important for the planters to obtain much of their labor force from births on the plantation itself.

The committee then began to summarize its argument in favor

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[120] Ibid., pp. 88-91

[121] Ibid., pp. 92-93.

of abolition. It spoke of "the injustices and cruelties which the slave trade directly and necessarily brings on"; the minimal importance of the slave trade itself as a branch of commerce; the possibility of using only slaves born in the islands to cultivate the plantations, since it appeared certain that the slaves were capable of reproducing enough to maintain their numbers; the greater safety which would ensue for the whites if creole slaves populated the islands; the small profits derived from using imported slaves; and the financial benefits to the planters of using only slaves born on the plantations. The committee therefore recommended that the Crown permit the slave trade to continue for another ten years. This would give the planters time to prepare for abolition of the trade by purchasing more slaves and to carry out the measures suggested in the report for improving the living conditions of the slaves in order to make the slave population self-perpetuating.[122]

Another reason for delaying abolition was that "the disturbances [Gährungen] among the slaves in the French islands could make it risky at the present time to proceed with any change concerning the slaves." But the committee noted that the future abolition of the slave trade was not to be officially publicized among the slaves in the Danish islands, and the other proposed changes affecting the treatment of the slaves "contain nothing which in any way could provide a cause for them to demand more immediately."[123]

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[122] Ibid., pp. 93-95.

[123] Ibid., pp. 96-97.

The committee proposed that the ten-year period of preparation for abolition should begin January 1, 1793, since there would be so little time in 1792 to begin implementing the measures it had recommended.[124]

Arguing that, for the sake of consistency, the Crown should not be content with abolishing the importation of slaves into the Danish West Indies, the committee urged that "no commerce in Negro slaves should be allowed to be conducted under the Danish flag." The committee pointed out that the Crown, in the contract signed with de Coninck's company, had reserved the right to reclaim authority over the forts in Guinea after giving a year's notice of its intention. Since the company had shown little enthusiasm for continuing the Guinea trade, it would probably offer no objections.

> It is therefore our opinion that nothing . . . stands in the way of forbidding the slave trade [for Danish subjects] everywhere and in so doing of setting an example, the importance of which we would allege as sufficient grounds [for abolition], if the issue did not already have so many arguments in its favor.
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> It might nevertheless be worth mentioning that Your Royal Majesty's decision [in favor of abolition] will, beyond any doubt, create a strong sensation in other nations which find themselves in similar circumstances with regard to the slave trade, and perhaps will produce effects which would be glorious for your Royal Majesty and a blessing for entire peoples [ganze Völker].[125]

The committee recommended postponing any decision on the future of Danish Guinea, saying that retention of the forts would depend entirely on the possibility of establishing colonies there

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[124] Ibid., p. 97.

[125] Ibid., pp. 98-100.

that would produce the same products presently grown in the West Indies. The progress of the English colony at Sierra Leone was deserving of attention and might provide an indication of the feasibility of a similar Danish endeavor.[126]

The committee concluded its report by saying that its "most humble presentation" was now to be entrusted to the Crown for approval. If the main points advocated in the report were accepted, the committee requested that it be allowed to send the resulting royal resolution immediately to the General Customs Department so that any changes needed could be made and the whole matter expedited.[127]

The committee's report bore a strong resemblance to Schimmelmann's Bedenken on the slave trade, combining humanitarian concern for the slaves with a pragmatic appraisal of the economics of abolition.[128] Despite the statements in the report that the immorality of the slave trade alone was sufficient grounds for a policy of abolition, it is evident that this was not quite the case so far as Schimmelmann and the committee were concerned. Their humanitarianism was genuine, as is evident from the language they used in condemning the trade as well as their thoughts on the desirability of emancipation (thoughts which were toned down

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[126] Ibid., p. 101.

[127] Ibid., p. 102.

[128] Schimmelmann's wife, in a letter to Countess Louise Stolberg on February 13, 1792, said of the report that "the style is Kirstein's, but the ideas to a great extent are Ernst's [le stil est de Kirstein, les idées en grand partie de Ernst]." See Bobé, Reventlowske Familiekreds, IV, p. 133.

considerably in the shortened public version of their report later printed in Minerva). Yet they were not prepared to advocate abolition if it appeared to pose a danger to sugar production in the islands. Having assured themselves that there was no such danger, they then sought to minimize the impact of abolition on the colonies by recommending a ten-year period of preparation which, along with the loans made available to the planters, would also serve to weaken opposition to abolition. The report offered something to everyone: the Crown would win international acclaim for its morality; Schimmelmann and the rest of the committee similarly would enjoy praise from their friends in Denmark; an unprofitable branch of commerce would be eliminated, though it would be stimulated in its final years; the planters with help from the state would be able to expand their labor force and thereby their sugar production; and if abolition stirred misgivings among them, the date set for ending the trade was distant enough to cause them little immediate anxiety. Now it remained for the Council of State to approve the committee's recommendations and for the General Customs Department to give its suggestions before the royal edict on abolition could be issued.

CHAPTER IV

The Abolition Edict

The Council of State approved the main recommendations of the Committee on the Slave Trade in a royal resolution on February 24, 1792. Charlotte Schimmelmann, for one, had known earlier of the Crown's acceptance of her husband's ideas.[1] But the public knew nothing of the matter, as the Council of State's deliberations were kept secret and, furthermore, were not recorded.

The fourteen-page resolution stated that, in accordance with the recommendations made by the comittee, the Crown found itself "compelled to abolish entirely the slave trade on the coast of Africa and in all other regions where the same might be conducted." The slave trade would, however, be allowed to continue until January 1, 1803, after which "no Negro slave may be purchased by our subjects, transported in Danish ships, or imported into our islands in the West Indies and offered for sale there."[2]

The resolution said that in order to avoid harming the

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[1]Bobé, Reventlowske Familiekreds, IV, 133.

[2]DSA, Vestindisk-guineisk Rente samt Generaltoldkammer, Om Negerhandelens Afskaffelse, Royal Resolution, February 24, 1792, p. 1. Page 1 of the resolution is reprinted as Appendix X.

economic well-being of persons dependent on the slave trade, the decision in favor of abolition should be made public immediately to allow everyone adequate time to prepare for its impact. The resolution approved the committee's proposal that planters who wished to purchase additional slaves in the years prior to the date set for abolition be granted government-guaranteed loans, provided they gave sufficient security, submitted to government ordinances to enforce improved treatment of slaves, and attempted to maintain or increase the size of the slave population on their plantations by reproduction alone. The plan for the loans should be drawn up in the West Indies by a committee consisting of the governor-general, the government, and the citizens in accordance with general guidelines set by the Committee on the Slave Trade. Final approval of the loan proposals would be given by the Council of State, and interest rates should range from four-and-a-half to five per cent. The Commission for the Liquidation of the West Indian Debt would be in charge of administering the loans.[3]

The Crown clearly considered an increase in the size of the island's labor force a crucial prelude to successful abolition of the slave trade. To make the acquisition of new slaves as easy as possible prior to 1803, the resolution said the slave trade to the Danish West Indies would henceforth be open to ships from all countries, with foreign vessels allowed to exchange slaves for sugar

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[3]Ibid., pp. 2-6.

and sell the sugar anywhere they wished, after paying the usual customs duty. As a means of encouraging the long-range growth of the field-labor force, the Crown adopted the committee's belief that the percentage of female slaves should be increased and said that, beginning in 1795, the head tax on female slaves used in field labor would be abolished and the tax on male slaves would be increased enough to avoid any loss of revenue. The Crown said that the head tax should be increased on those house slaves in any home whose numbers exceed a certain necessary minimum, indicating its acceptance of the committee's argument that house slaves were often unproductive status symbols and, because they were more likely to be single, failed to have as many offspring as did field slaves.[4]

The resolution also supported the committee's view that slave marriages had to be encouraged and said a ceremony should be held at each marriage, whether the slaves involved were Christian or heathen; slave marriages were to be dissolved when one of the partners demanded a divorce, but there was to be a ceremony marking the solemnity of the parting. The Crown then took a step which, if carried through, would have placed important restrictions over the slave-holders' power to dispose of their slaves as they chose: it said planters could not separate married slave couples, nor could they take a slave child under six years old from its mother against her will. All slave children under six were to be taught Christianity and

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[4] Ibid., pp. 7-8.

baptized, though no child would be baptized without the permission of its mother.[5]

With regard to the teachers whom the committee wanted to have sent onto the plantations to teach Christianity to the slaves and serve as mediators between the slaves and their masters, the Crown said that the teachers should also keep records of slave births, deaths, marriages, and divorces, as well as informing the overseer or planter about instances of adultery and fornication among the slaves. The teachers should also warn the masters when slave children were not being properly instructed. The Crown agreed with the committee that Moravian missionaries were best suited to serve as the slaves' instructors in religion, with the government covering the costs incurred by the missionaries.[6]

The Council of State concluded the resolution by stating that no slaves in the Danish islands were to be sold to foreign colonies, and deportation of slaves guilty of criminal offenses was to occur only with the permission of the governor-general. The General Customs Department was instructed to study the resolution and present its own report on the contents of the resolution and on arrangements needed to comply with the orders of the Council of State. A decision on the future of the Danish forts and factories on the Guinea coast was postponed.[7]

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[5] Ibid., pp. 9-10.

[6] Ibid., pp. 11-13.

[7] Ibid., pp. 13-14.

The committee asked the General Customs Department to study the royal resolution and suggest adjustments which could be embodied in the edict proclaiming an end to the Danish slave trade. The committee wanted a prompt response from the department so that the edict could be published as soon as possible and sent to the West Indies "with the first ship sailing there from Copenhagen."[8]

The General Customs Department sent its thirty-two page Forestilling on the resolution to the Council of State on March 13. The department decided that matters such as slave marriages, education, and the loans for purchase of new slaves from Africa did not come under its jurisdiction, and concentrated its remarks on the proposals for opening the slave trade to ships of all nations, outlawing the exportation of slaves from the islands, and changing the head tax to try to increase the number of female slaves and thereby help bring about a higher birth rate. The department insisted that it had long sought to ameliorate slave treatment in the Danish West Indies and to supply the islands with the number of slaves needed for maximum production. It added that the slaves could never be properly educated so long as new slaves from Africa were needed and available; and encouragement of slave marriages and milder treatment of female slaves was unlikely to become widespread

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[8]DSA, Vestindisk-guineisk Rente samt Generaltoldkammer, Dokumenter vedkommende Kommissionen til Negerhandelens bedre Indretning og Ophaevelse, Pro Memoria from Committee on the Slave Trade to General Customs Department, February 29, 1792.

because of the very existence of the Atlantic slave trade. Also, the best interests of the Guinea Trade often failed to coincide with those of the Danish West Indies, the result being a significant reduction in the advantages Denmark obtained from its Caribbean colonies. Therefore, in order "to overcome the difficulties, avoid financial losses for Crown and colonies, and improve the treatment of the slaves," the department said it was convinced that the decision to abolish the slave trade was wise.[9]

> Also, in another regard, and even if the cruelty connected with this trade were lost sight of, the abolition of this trade would still be advisable. For . . . the ferment which now exists among the blacks in the West Indies might spread to the Danish colonies, which islands have not always been secure and free from slave revolts [Neger Opstande]. And the seeds of revolt will, if the slave trade continues, always be brought in from Guinea, as the slaves, abducted in a violent and cruel manner, will, no matter how well they are treated in the West Indies, continue to miss their homeland, their friends, their freedom and their previous effortless existence.
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> But from those slaves who are born in the islands, raised there, accustomed from childhood to the labor expected of them, and acquainted with no other persons than those with whom they are raised, there is little to fear.

From this point of view, the nation which first abolishes the slave trade is the nation which will act most wisely.[10]

The department agreed with the committee's conclusions in the latter's report of December 28, 1791, that the slave population of

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[9]DSA, Vestindisk-guineisk Rente samt Generaltoldkammer, Dokumenter vedkommende Negerhandelens bedre Indretning og Ophaevelse, Generaltoldkamrets Allerunderdanigst Forestilling concerning abolition of the slave trade, March 13, 1792, pp. 1-6.

[10]Ibid., pp. 6-7.

the islands could become self-sustaining once the needed reforms in slave treatment were made, the proper ratio of female to male slaves established, and the planters, knowing they could no longer buy new slaves from Africa, found it to their own advantage to "promote marriages and provide for the preservation and care of the newborn." The department added, in a passage suggesting little in the way of humanitarian concern for the slaves, that with better care and food the slave population would surely increase, for this was the case with "domestic animals everywhere [Husdyrene overalt]."[11]

The department noted that all of its members (three of whom--Scheel, head of the department, and Trant and Tønder Lund-- were members of the committee on the Slave Trade) except Justitsraad Hansteen agreed that the slave trade could be abolished as proposed without harming Denmark and the Danish West Indies. Hansteen, in a separate Forestilling, conceded that "the idea of abolition . . . is for every right-thinking person magnificent and excellent." But he did not think it could be carried out in the time allowed. The risk posed by epidemics of smallpox and other diseases was too great. Also, most planters were already deeply in debt, their property mortgaged, their yearly income dependent on a climate in which droughts were frequent. Wealthy planters such as Schimmelmann, whose plantations had enough slaves already, could manage despite abolition of the slave trade. But poorer planters would be ruined, Hansteen argued. These planters would seek to escape their creditors by

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[11] Ibid., p. 8.

fleeing the Danish islands at night, taking their slaves with them, and leaving the colonies with a serious labor shortage. He also warned that the slaves might become dangerously restless if they learned that the laws hitherto enforced by the government were no longer supported by, "in the language of the slaves, the so-called European King." Hansteen therefore urged (1) that publication of the abolition edict be delayed, (2) that changes directly affecting the slaves be announced in the islands by the governor-general and the colonial government so that the slaves could more easily be kept obedient to local authorities and respectful of the latter's authority, (3) that the planters be exhorted to grant their slaves better treatment, for without the planters' voluntary cooperation little could be accomplished, and (4) that planters who undertook reforms as urged by the Crown through the colonial government be rewarded by the Crown.[12]

The department countered Hansteen's views by expressing doubt about the extent of the threat of epidemic diseases, especially smallpox as a killer of children, for "The intelligent slave master will look after his slave children by having them inoculated." And the potential losses to epidemics had been included in projections made of the probable growth of the slave population under improved

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[12]DSA, Vestindisk-guineisk Rente samt Generaltoldkammer, Dokumenter vedkommende Negerhandelens bedre Indretning og Ophaevelse, Justitsraads Hansteen's Forestilling concerning abolition of the slave trade, March 14, 1792, pp. 1-6.

circumstances.[13] Hansteen's fears that the planters faced financial ruin were without basis, for new slaves could be purchased during the next ten years by means of the proposed program of state-guaranteed loans. Without the loans, the department believed, abolition would fail, for the required number of new slaves could never be purchased by the planters if the latter had to rely entirely on their own resources; and without the loans, the planters might not be inclined to cooperate with the government and accept abolition. Concerning Hansteen's fear that the authority of the West Indian regime would be dangerously diminished in the eyes of the slaves if it appeared the royal government in Copenhagen reached decisions without consulting with local authorities, the department said the slaves knew nothing about how or by whom decisions affecting them were reached, and would hardly trouble themselves about the matter even if they did know.[14]

In order to encourage the sale of female slaves in the Danish islands, the department recommended that an equal amount of sugar be made available for export in return for both male and female slaves, setting the amount at 2,000 pounds for healthy adults, 1,000 pounds for adolescents, and nothing for children.[15] The West Indian government in 1787 had urged, in an effort to open the slave trade to ships of all nations and increase the supply and lower the price

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[13]Generaltoldkamrets Forestilling concerning abolition of the slave trade, pp. 11-12.

[14]Ibid., pp. 12-14.

[15]Ibid., pp. 22-23.

of slaves in the Danish islands, that 2,000 pounds be set as the amount of sugar that could be exchanged for an adult male slave, with only 1,000 allowed for a female slave, a policy which if followed now that the Danish government had decided to open the trade would encourage slave ships to deliver only male slaves rather than female ones to the Danish West Indies, thereby undermining the goal of creating an equilibrium between the sexes in the interests of a higher birth rate.[16] The trading of sugar to foreign slavers in payment for slaves would indeed remove some sugar from the home market, a violation of traditional policy, but this would be compensated for by the increase in sugar production in the islands that would soon result from the efforts of the growing labor force.[17]

Regarding the duty on imported slaves, which since 1764 had stood at four rigsdaler for an adult, two for an adolescent, and one for a child, the department discussed the possibility of doubling the duty on male slaves while removing it from female slaves, but said perhaps the tax should be levied on the sugar exported in exchange for the slaves, "in order to avoid the unpleasantness of levying a tax on people." Yet each of these possibilities seemed to militate against the Crown's goal of encouraging slave ships to supply the Danish islands with as many slaves as possible prior to 1803. The

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[16]DSA, Vestindisk-guineisk Rente samt Generaltoldkammer, Om Negerhandelens Afskaffelse, Bemaerkninger . . . angaaende Slave-Handelen, report from government of Danish West Indies to General Customs Department, October 15, 1787, p. 13.

[17]Generaltoldkamrets Forestilling, pp. 23-24.

department therefore recommended that all slaves be imported into the Danish colonies duty free or, as an alternative, that the duty on female slaves be abolished, with that on male slaves remaining unchanged or being doubled to compensate for the loss of revenue caused by ending the duty on female slaves.[18]

The Crown wanted to end by January 1, 1795, the head tax paid by planters on female field slaves, while raising the head tax on male slaves by an amount sufficient to avoid a loss of revenue. The department recommended that this increase in the head tax on male slaves be set at twice the current tax. The department, while not disagreeing with the Crown that an increase in the head tax on "excessive [overflødige]" house slaves was needed, stressed that no action should be taken in that regard until the colonial government had been given a chance to study the situation and recommend how many house slaves were needed by a white family, how many of them were actually artisans who should perhaps not be considered as house slaves, and how much in extra taxes a family should pay for keeping excessive numbers of house slaves.[19] The Crown approved all of the department's recommendations for inclusion in the abolition edict, except that no import duty would be levied on female slaves, while the export duty on sugar exchanged for slaves would be increased by one-half per cent to replace revenue lost by revoking

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[18]Ibid., pp. 24-28.

[19]Ibid., pp. 29-31.

the duty on female slaves.[20]

The edict announcing abolition was issued on March 16 and stated that the Crown, after having all aspects of the slave trade studied carefully, had concluded that it would be "beneficial and profitable" [velgiørende og gavnligt] if the need to import slaves from Africa could be suspended and cultivation of the islands left to "workers who, born and raised on the islands, were from an early age accustomed to the work, the local environment [Himmelegnen], and the people under whom they are to labor." The report of the Committee on the Slave Trade had clearly shown "that is is possible to end the slave trade and that it would be of advantage to our West Indian islands to do without the purchase of new slaves, once the plantations have been supplied with enough slaves to maintain the population by reproduction alone."[21] To help attain the goal of a self-sustaining slave population, the Crown would provide assistance for plantation owners who needed to purchase more slaves, and slave marriages, education and improved moral conduct were to be encouraged. No mention was made of the suffering caused by the slave trade; indeed, abolition was depicted as a favor which the Crown was performing for the colonies, as the edict stated that immediate publication of the Crown's plans concerning the slave trade was necessary "in order to

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[20]DSA, Vestindisk-guineisk Rente samt Generaltoldkammer, Vestindisk Journal, No. 80, 1792, p. 1.

[21]DSA, Vestindisk-guineisk Rente samt Generaltoldkammer, Om Negerhandelens Afskaffelse, Forordning om Negerhandelen, March 16, 1792, p. 1. See Appendix XI.

free our West Indian possessions from their dependence on the slave trade and eventually to make the slave trade unnecessary."[22]

The remainder of the edict consisted of six provisions dealing with different aspects of the slave trade. The first announced that abolition would take effect January 1, 1803. Danish subjects thenceforth could not participate in any aspect of the slave trade on the coast of Africa or anywhere else outside the Danish West Indies, but trade in slaves in the Danish islands themselves would be permitted. Prior to the end of 1802, the slave trade to the Danish islands was to be open to ships of all nations, in order to encourage competition, lower prices, and defuse long-standing objections by planters that they could not purchase enough healthy slaves from Danish slavers. Another measure designed to increase the sale of slaves in the Danish islands was the permission given to foreign slavers to take raw sugar out of the islands for sale in foreign countries--2,000 pounds of sugar for an adult slave, 1,000 for an adolescent, but nothing for a child. The import duty on female slaves was to be remitted, the loss in revenue to be made up by a .5 per cent increase in the duty on sugar exported to foreign countries in exchange for slaves. The head tax on female field slaves was to end on January 1, 1795, but the tax on male slaves was to be doubled. The head tax would remain in effect for female house slaves. Export of slaves from the islands was banned; and only in cases where the

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[22]Ibid., pp. 1-2.

government believed it absolutely necessary could slaves convicted of crimes be deported.[23]

The response in Denmark to the abolition edict was muted, for the public had been kept ignorant of the government's deliberations on the slave trade, probably in part from fear of an adverse response to the possibility of abolition from those who might feel their interests threatened. Doubts were expressed to Schimmelmann by one of his secretaries, who wrote, in an apparent reference to the plan for abolition, that it would surely receive widespread acclaim, and was an "honor for mankind and for the Schimmelmann name [Ehre für die Menscheit und für den Schimmelmannschen Nahmen]." Yet it was a delicate undertaking which could "be accompanied by very grievous consequences [mit sehr betrubte Folgen begleitet werden], not only for the Count's own property but also for the entire island."[24] Such fears, as well as untimely rumors circulating in Denmark or, worse, the islands, could only cause problems. There was considerable confusion among those Danes who took note of the abolition decree, and many apparently thought all trade in slaves, including that within

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[23]Ibid., pp. 2-3.

[24]DSA, Vestindisk-guineisk Rente samt Generaltoldkammer, hereafter abbreviated VGRGT, Dokumenter vedkommende kommissionen til Negerhandelens bedre Indretning og Ophaevelse, fragment of a letter, undated, in the margin of which is written "Schmidt von Lübeck, Privatsekretaer hos Grev E. Schimmelmann, Udkast til Forordningen om Negerhandelens Ophaevelse, Fragment fra Lindenborg." Lindenborg was one of Schimmelmann's estates.

the Danish West Indies, was to be outlawed.[25] Belief was widespread that slavery itself was to end.[26] The poet P. A. Heiberg praised Crown Prince Frederik for freeing the peasants and the slaves.[27]

Three journals commented on the abolition edict, all favorably. In Altona, Schirach wrote in his Politisches Journal that the abolition edict had brought honor to Denmark as the first country to end its slave trade.[28] The most important journal in Denmark was the pro-reform monthly Minerva; it had been founded in 1785 by Christen Pram and K. L. Rahbek, both prominent literary figures enjoying good connections with the governing elite.[29]

The April 1792 issue of Minerva contained a slightly abbreviated Danish translation of the original report of the committee on the Slave Trade with a forward by Kirstein, Schimmelmann's private secretary and secretary to the committee, which provides his and

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[25]H. Lawaetz, Peter von Scholten (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1940), p. 137.

[26]A.S. Ørsted, Af mit Livs og min Tids Historie (2 vols.; Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandling, 1852), II, 94.

[27]Vibaek, Dansk Vestindien, p. 181.

[28]Politisches Journal, Altona, April 1792, p. 443.

[29]Vibaek, Reform og Fallit, p. 188. Rahbek was primarily interested in the theater, but Pram was concerned with politics and humanitarian reform. See Hans Peter Kyrre, Kund Lyne Rahbek, Kamma Rahbek og Livet paa Bakkehuset (2nd ed.; Copenhagen: H. Hagerups Forlag, 1929), p. 112. Pram had written the poem inscribed on the monument Schimmelmann built in honor of his first wife following her death, and he and Rahbek were frequent visitors at Schimmelmann's palace. See Gustav Albeck and F. J. Billeskov Jansen, Fra Runerne til Johannes Ewald, Vol. I of Dansk Literatur Historie, ed. by P. H. Trausted (4 vols.; Copenhagen: Politikens Forlag, 1964-66), pp. 587-88.

presumably the committee's views on why the committee had favored abolition. Kirstein commented on the excitement which abolition had created in England and France and praised William Wilberforce for his "persistent firmness, which is nourished by his . . . noble intentions and which seldom fails to achieve its purpose . . . . The name of Wilberforce shall live forever in history."[30] Kirstein mistakenly assumed that the vote in the House of Commons in favor of gradual abolition meant that England had decided to stop participating in the slave trade. He wrote that, because of the revolution in France and the slave revolt on St. Domingue, it was impossible to predict what would happen to abolitionism in France. He said it was a mistake to blame the St. Domingue revolt on measures suggested in France to help the slaves, for recent information indicated clearly that the revolt was the outgrowth of disputes among the whites and between the whites and the free gens de couleur. The slaves were tools used by others. Kirstein thereby dealt with potential arguments against helping the slaves in the Danish islands, implying that improving the living conditions of the slaves there would not lead to revolt. Kirstein pointed out that though the Danish slave trade was small in comparison with that of England and France, it was important enough to Denmark to require the full attention of the government. The committee had concluded that the

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[30]Ernst Philip Kirstein, "Udtog af Forestillingen til Kongen angaaende Negerhandelens Afskaffelse," Minerva, April 1792, p. 43.

trade was so barbarous that abolition was the only possible action. Thus Kirstein made the immorality of the slave trade appear to be the prime factor motivating the committee. He ignored economic arguments against the slave trade which held that the trade was a burden to the state and could not be made profitable. Having decided that the slave trade should be abolished on moral grounds, the committee, he wrote, had then sought a way of ending the trade without being unfair to the planters--of "combining humaneness with . . . fairness toward the planters."[31]

The result, according to Kirstein, was a study made to determine wehther the slave population could become self-sustaining. The committee concluded that this was possible, unanimously approved the report, and sent it to the Council of State; the latter in its turn unanimously endorsed the report, resulting in the edict of March 16 abolishing the slave trade. The committee had assumed the planters would cooperate, because the slave trade would be ended in a way beneficial to their interests and because such a noble cause as abolition would surely appeal to the planters' sense of justice, once they had been shown how the goal could be reached.[32]

Borgervennen, a weekly, was the third Danish journal to respond to the abolition edict. Borgervennen showed interest in slavery prior to the abolition edict of March 16: on March 2, an

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[31] Ibid., pp. 45-46.

[32] Ibid., p. 46.

editorial comment on slavery asked, "When will the time come when all human beings will become humane and once more tie the bonds of holy brotherly love?"[33] In the next issue, Borgervennen praised "our good prince" for taking an interest in abolition and for appointing men, "from whose ideas and competence one can expect so much, to investigate the condition of the slaves on the Danish islands in the West Indies."[34] After publication of the abolition edict, Borgervennen said the Danish government was wise to compromise in its approach to abolition and to allow ten years before banning the slave trade: "In this intervening period much can be done to overcome the difficulties [posed by abolition]."[35]

Borgervennen's interest in the slave trade and slavery was probably stimulated by its co-editor, Johan Philip Rosenstand-Goiske (1754-1815), a former theology student who worked in the General Customs Department from 1781 to 1813.[36] From 1792 to 1795 he was co-editor of Borgervennen; throughout his career he championed humanitarian reform in his many speeches and writings. In 1790 he wrote Forsøg til en Laerebog i Religionen, which he intended for use

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[33] Borgervennen, March 2, 1792, p. 207.

[34] Ibid., March 9, 1792, p. 220.

[35] Ibid., April 27, 1792, p. 282.

[36] Rosenstand-Goiske's father was a noted theologian who had been a professor at the University of Copenhagen and had helped popularize in Denmark the belief that reason and religion could never conflict. See Dansk Biografisk Lexikon, VI (1892), 222 ff. Rosenstand-Goiske's brother, Peder, began modern Danish drama criticism in the 1770s. See Albeck and Billeskov, Dansk Litteratur Historie, I, 473ff.

in teaching the slaves in the Danish West Indies about Christianity.[37] Rosenstand-Goiske was later to play a major role in the struggle to get the Crown to stand by its decision on abolition.

There was no public opposition in Denmark to the abolition edict. The Times (London) published a report from Copenhagen dated March 30, which stated that the edict "does not seem to have caused any stir in Denmark among the West India merchants, and it is not thought it will cause any in the islands."[38]

A letter in the papers of the Committee on the Slave Trade indicates that at least one former West India bureaucrat opposed abolition, however: he was U.W. Röepstorff, former Kommandant of St. Thomas and St. John and governor of the Danish West Indies during Struensee's ascendancy.[39] Röepstroff wrote that, though he sympathized with the "pure intentions" of the edict, the slave trade could not be ended entirely because an epidemic might at any time destroy a large part of the slave labor force, a view that would be repeated in later years when opponents of abolition made a powerful attempt to have the edict revoked. Röepstorff also feared that the slaves would become progressively "whiter" as a result of "mixing with the whites" (blandning med de Blancke), until they were as light-skinned as the Europeans and were no longer able to work

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[37] Dansk Biografisk Lexikon, VI (1892), 221-22.

[38] The Times (London), April 19, 1792, p. 3.

[39] David P. Henige, Colonial Governors From the Fifteenth Century to the Present (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970), p. 10.

"in the fields in the excessive heat of the sun" without dying. Finally, "in order to keep 30,000 white Negroes under control . . . the presence of 10,000 soldiers would be required."[40]

Though rather bizarre in formulation, Rœpstorff's fears that abolition would lead to economic catastrophe and slave revolt were fundamental tenets held by most European and West Indian opponents of abolition; in response to such doubts that the slave trade could be ended, Rosenstand-Goiske wrote an article entitled "Letter From the Country" (Brev fra Landet) in Borgervennen in support of the edict. Though no written, public criticism of the edict had appeared, opposition had surely been expressed orally, and Rosenstand-Goiske was probably aware of Rœpstorff's letter as well as Hansteen's Forestilling of March 14. Rosenstand-Goiske wrote that critics of the abolition edict were using the same arguments that had been advanced against the agrarian reforms a few years earlier; he predicted that, just as the agrarian reforms had been followed by several years of excellent harvests, abolition of the slave trade would lead to bountiful harvests in the West Indies as a sign that "enforcement of humanitarianism and the ennobling of man are blessed."[41] But in addition to his conviction that a noble act was certain to be rewarded, Rosenstand-Goiske believed there

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[40]DSA, Vestindisk-guineisk Rente samt Generaltoldkammer, Dokumenter vedkommende Kommissionen til Negerhandelens bedre Indretning og Ophaevelse, unaddressed letter from U.W. Rœpstorff, March 25, 1792.

[41]Johan Philip Rosenstand-Goiske, "Brev fra Landet, Borgervennen, June 15, 1792, pp. 331-34.

were other, more concrete, reasons for assuming that abolition would prove beneficial to all. He asked:

> Can anything be more unnatural, both politically and economically, than to fetch workers, at great cost, from other parts of the world, in order to cultivate the soil? Can this arrangement continue to exist in the face of enlightenment [kan denne Indretning bestaae med Oplysning]? Isn't it more natural for the islands to produce their own workers? . . . Is it not more reasonable for plantations to be operated in Africa by African natives, instead of having Africans work in chains in such far-away places [as America] for the benefit of a few persons?[42]

As for the contention that the West Indian planters would be ruined and cultivation of sugar would cease in the event of abolition, Rosenstand-Goiske answered that the report of the Committee on the Slave Trade had provided ample evidence that the islands' economy would not suffer. He added that English debates on abolition had shown that the planters could prosper without constantly buying new slaves; consequently, there should be no doubt as to the ability of planters in the Danish West Indies to do the same. His own optimistic calculations, which he admitted were not based on hard evidence, were used to show, at least to his own satisfaction, that the slave population would more than reproduce itself once the imbalance between the sexes was ended and slave labor conditions improved.[43]

As expected, the Danish edict attracted attention abroad, especially in England, where Wilberforce's campaign for abolition was being waged in the House of Commons. English abolitionists favored

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[42] Ibid., p. 335.

[43] Ibid., pp. 335-37.

immediate abolition; however, the Danish edict posed a problem for them, as it suggested the best approach to the slave trade was to avoid immediate abolition in favor of a less disruptive, long-range approach.[44] The Danish ambassador in London kept Copenhagen informed of the progress of Wilberforce's abolition bill in the spring of 1792 and provided some information on how the Danish edict was received in England. He noted on March 27 that he was pleased to learn of the Danish edict, "dictée par des principes d'humanité."[45] The edict was praised for being fair to all interests and for displaying "the circumspection necessary in order to prevent false interpretations resulting from either ignorance or bad intentions."[46] Further insight into how the Danish edict was viewed in England is provided by Fredrik Sneedorff, a prominent Danish historian who was in London in the spring of 1792 as part of a lengthy tour of western Europe.[47] Sneedorff expressed his joy at learning of the Danish government's plans to abolish the slave trade and added that he was proud "that my fatherland has given Europe an example in this important matter."[48] Sneedorff wrote in a letter dated May 4, 1792, that the

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[44]Sir Reginald Coupland, Wilberforce (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), pp. 160-61.

[45]DSA, Departement for udenrigske Anliggender, 1771-1848. England II. Depecher 1792-93, No. 24, London, March 27, 1792, p. 1.

[46]Ibid., No. 28, April 20, 1792, p. 1.

[47]Dansk Biografisk Lexikon, XVI (1902), 135-37.

[48]Frederik Sneedorffs Samlede Skrifter (Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Forlag, 1794), pp. 468-69.

Morning Post had published an abridged version of the Danish abolition decree on April 19 and had apparently misunderstood its provisions:

> The entire decree was twisted so badly that it was clear that a member of Wilberforce's group, which adovcates immediate abolition, had intentionally had it published in mutilated form. I gave my copy of the decree to Mr. Wolf, our Danish consul, and he promised to translate it and have it printed; but when I returned to see him the next day, the entire decree had already been translated word for word in the April 21 issue of the Times.[49]

Sneedorff suggested that Henry Dundas, whose amendment inserting the word "gradually" into Wilberforce's motion for abolition had been approved by the House of Commons on April 3, or someone else supporting gradual abolition might have been responsible.[50] The Times itself supported gradual abolition, describing immediate abolition as a way "to injure ourselves by precipitate annihilation."[51] Later, above the translation of the decree in the April 21 issue, the Times criticized the English abolitionists for misleading the public about the Danish decree, saying they had wrongly referred to it as "an Edict for the immediate abolition of the slave trade . . . . How far they are warranted in putting such a construction on this Edict, we leave our Readers to judge, by laying before them a genuine

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[49]Ibid., pp. 490-91. This translation is the one used in Elizabeth Donnan, Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America, Vol. II, The Eighteenth Century (4 vols.; Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1931), pp. 616-17.

[50]Frederik Sneedorffs Samlede Skrifter, p. 491.

[51]The Times (London), April 12, 1792, p. 2.

Translation . . . [in order to expose] their nefarious arts."[52] So, just as the Danes were careful observers of abolitionism in England, the English made use of the Danish decree in their own domestic debates.

It is possible that the Danish approach to the issue of abolition influenced Dundas' decision to favor "gradual" abolition. He certainly must have known of the ten-year delay in implementing abolition, which was the centerpiece of the Danish edict, prior to the April 2 debate in the Commons, during which he successfully inserted the word "gradually" into Wilberforce's bill. And the Danish ambassador noted in his report of April 20: "The considerations embodied in the Danish edict have already been strongly recommended by distinguished members of the English government [ont deja été fortement recommande par des membres Distingués du governement Anglais]," and he added that he had every reason to believe the Danish edict would influence "future English deliberations on the subject."[53]

For the Danish government the problem was gaining acceptance for the edict in the Danish West Indies. The cooperation of both the colonial government and the planters was crucial. On March 24, 1792,

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[52]Ibid., April 21, 1792, p. 3. In particular the Times admonished the abolitionists for having "artfully misrepresented" the third provision of the edict as requiring "a duty of 2000 lb. of sugar upon every slave imported" and added that the Danish government "has undertaken to lend money at 4 per cent to the Planters of St. Croix to enable them to purchase slaves."

[53]Departement for udenrigske Anliggender, England, Depecher 1792-93, No. 28, April 20, 1792, p. 2.

the General Customs Department sent a letter and 100 copies of the abolition edict to the government of the West Indies; the copies of the edict were to be distributed throughout the islands, but only after the planters, organized in their burger councils, had been told about the edict and of "his majesty's well-meaning intentions."[54]

The letter contained an explanation of the Danish government's decision in favor of abolition and requested data on the islands' slave population so that planning for the reforms mentioned in the royal resolution of February 24 could proceed. The General Customs Department told the colonial government that the abolition edict expressed the same humanitarian spirit as the colonial government's letter of October 15, 1787, to the department. (See pp. 55-56 above.) The department instructed the government to post signs throughout the islands to inform everyone that it was permissible for ships of all nations to sell slaves in the Danish islands in exchange for the amounts of sugar stipulated in the abolition edict. But the letter was careful to note:

> The edict permits the importation of male and female slaves from the African coast only. In accordance with this it ought to be clear that no slaves or people of color [Folk af kouleur] can be brought into the Danish islands who have already spent a long time on other islands in the West Indies, and this is especially true regarding slaves from those islands where the slaves are in revolt, because importing them could cause unrest [Uroeligheder] and tumult among the slaves in the Danish islands.[55]

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[54]DSA, Vestindisk-guineisk Rente samt Generaltoldkammer, Om Negerhandelens Afskaffelse, Letter from General Customs Department to government of Danish West Indies, March 24, 1792, p. 1.

[55]Ibid., pp. 2-3.

Concerning loans and financial aid for planters needing more slaves, the department said that the necessary arrangements would be made. It pointed out that loans were available primarily for the purchase of field slaves; house slaves, when not also capable of serving as skilled artisans, were not important. To encourage a reduction in the number of house slaves, it had been decided that the head tax on house slaves would be increased in instances where a clearly excessive number of such slaves was maintained. Accordingly, the department asked the colonial government to present a report detailing how many house slaves of each sex were needed by a family in the countryside and in the towns, and recommending how large the tax increase should be. Also, the department wanted to know whether house slaves who were also artisans ought to be exempted from this tax increase in cases where their ranks exceeded the number of house slaves deemed necessary for a rural or urban residence.[56]

Concerning slave marriages and education, the department sent a letter to the Danish Chancery, which was in charge of the department, informing it of the measures being taken to fulfill the reforms stipulated in the royal resolution of February 24. The department emphasized the importance of improving the morality of the slaves in order to give their marriages greater stability and security and to better the upbringing and education of their children. Slave marriages, whether the slaves involved were Christian or heathen,

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[56]Ibid., pp. 3-4.

were to be entered into by means of "certain . . . prescribed formalities," after which the couple was to be considered married. Such marriages were not to be disbanded except on demand of one or both of the partners; married couples were not to be separted against their will under any circumstances. Nor were children to be separated from their parents before the age of six; all slave children were to be educated and raised in the Christian religion, and to that end all slaves were to be gathered into Christian congregations, each of which would be under the direction of a specially appointed Christian teacher. Moravian missionaries, because of their successful experience, should be used in these positions.[57]

That the department was not solely motivated by a desire to help the slaves is shown by its comment on the close relationship between the reforms it wanted implemented and the economic well-being of both the islands and Denmark itself. In order to bring the colonies to full prosperity and obtain for the Crown's subjects in Europe the maximum benefit of owning colonies, the common welfare of both the Mother country and the colonies had to be considered. It was essential to the welfare of all that the planters be supplied with enough slaves "who have attained, for their condition, a suitable degree of morality."

> They [the slaves] must be able to maintain and increase their numbers in the islands by procreation alone [De maae kunne ved

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[57]DSA, Vestindisk-guineisk Rente samt Generaltoldkammer, Om Negerhandelens Afskaffelse, Letter from General Customs Department to Danish Chancery, May 22, 1792, pp. 1-2.

> den naturlige Forplantelse underholde og formere deres Maengde paa Øerne] This they have hitherto been unable to accomplish. But with proper and steady marriages, with education in religion and the morality acquired therefrom, with more lenient treatment [mere skaansomme Omgang] by their masters, it is thought that the number of working slaves in the islands can be maintained and possibly increased . . . . In that way the full prosperity of the islands will be attained . . . and the Crown's goal [Hensigt] will be promoted, namely that the slave trade to the Danish West Indies shall cease entirely after a short while.[58]

The department noted that it had requested that the West Indian government supply information on the number of Christian married couples among the slave population as well as on the number of heathen couples living together and the number of children under eight. Suggestions as to how many congregations the islands should be divided into and how many teachers would be required had also been sought from the colonial government. Since both the schools for the slaves and the protection needed for slave marriages were dependent on the cooperation of the colonists and closely bound up with the economy of the islands, it would be best to adopt a plan that was "adapted to local conditions [indrettet efter den lokale Forfatning] and suited to the special circumstances [of the islands]." In adopting this approach the department was in effect abandoning hopes for implementing the reforms, for "local conditions" would not permit an outside power, the state, to interfere with the relationship between master and slave. The department suggested that the 1,800 rigsdaler vestindisk courant which the Crown had used to support Luthern missionary activity in the islands could help cover the cost

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[58] Ibid., pp. 3-4.

of establishing the congregations and schools for the slaves.[59]

After carefully deliberating on the various problems posed by abolition, the Danish government had made its decision, coupling abolition ten years hence with a wide-open slave trade and loans to planters to buy slaves in the meantime; it had also urged that reforms be made immediately with the dual purpose of alleviating the harsh lot of the slaves and of enabling the latter to reproduce in sufficient quantity so that, once abolition took effect, no more slaves from outside would be needed. The question now was: How would the planters respond?

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[59] Ibid., pp. 4-5. Rigsdaler vestindisk courant was a currency valued at twenty per cent less than dansk courant, which was used in Denmark.

CHAPTER V

The Colonial Response to the Abolition Edict, 1792-96

The West Indian government moved cautiously after receiving on May 24 the General Customs Department's pro-memoria of March 24 and 100 copies of the abolition edict. The St. Croix Burger Council was given eight copies of the edict on July 4, at which time the colonial government informed the planters' representatives of the financial support the Crown had pledged to aid the planters in purchasing more slaves "in order to guarantee that the island was cultivated sufficiently." Accordingly, the government asked the Burger Council to conduct a survey of the planters on the island to determine "how many slaves of each sex it was thought St. Croix might need."[1]

The planters, had they not been offered the prospect of loans guaranteed by the Crown, might have resisted abolition; yet the abolition edict, with its provision for a ten-year grace period before suspension of the slave trade, reduced any apprehensions the planters might have felt, for ten years was a long time, especially

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[1]DSA, VGRGT, Vestindisk Journal, 1793, No. 139. Letter from government of Danish West Indies to General Customs Department, December 31, 1792, p. 1.

in the West Indies, where planters commonly sought quick profits and dreamed of a triumphant return to their European homeland, with their future financial status secure.[2] Once the planters had been told of the Crown's decision, the edict was made public, appearing in St. Thomas Tidende on August 18 in the Danish original and an English translation.[3]

The loan to the planters was a cornerstone of the abolition plan, serving both to overcome the planters opposition and to encourage a rapid increase in the slave population prior to 1803. Governor Walterstorff wrote the Committee on the Slave Trade that he hoped abolition would succeed, for "who could be so insensitive that he did not want to give a willing hand to clear away those difficulties which could halt or oppose that most noble of all goals--to promote the welfare of an oppressed people [at befordre et undertrykket Slaegts Vel]?" The Committee on the Slave Trade, which had been given the task of overseeing arrangements for the loan to the planters by the royal resolution of February 24, 1792, finished a preliminary proposal for administering the loans on March 19 and sent it to the West Indian government. The Committee wanted the loans to be used only for buying slaves to work land already under cultivation, and it requested an estimate of how many more slaves

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[2]Hans West complained bitterly of the tendency of St. Croix planters to leave the island and return to England as soon as they had made what they considered was enough money. See his Plan til ved et enkelt Forsøg at befordre Mark-Negernes Oplysning og Formildelse i Kaar m. v. paa Eilandet St. Croix, p. 2.

[3]St. Thomas Tidende, August 18, 1792, p. 1.

would be needed to attain maximum production and to maintain the size of the slave labor force after 1802.[4] Walterstorff, the governor of the Danish West Indies, responded that this provision was acceptable if he understood the committee's meaning correctly--that no plantations established in the future were to be permitted access to the loan fund, but those plantations presently in existence and suffering a labor shortage would be able to expand production by using the loans to acquire new slaves.[5]

The committee wanted agreements reached with the planters on how many additional slaves were to be purchased by means of the loan for each plantation; it also wanted each planter to be obliged to maintain a certain number of slaves on his plantation. The mortgage which the planters provided for the loans should cover the entire sum granted them.[6] Walterstorff agreed that the planters should tell the government how many slaves they wished to purchase by means of the loan in the next ten years and added that it would be necessary to allow the planters to use the slaves acquired each year as security for the loans, something Schimmelmann had hoped to avoid. But after considerable repayments had been made by the planters, the loan committee in the islands should be authorized to

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[4]DSA, VGRGT, Allerunterthänigste Vorstellung of the Committee on the Slave Trade concerning the proposed loans to planters for buying more slaves, Copenhagen, March 19, 1792, p. 1.

[5]DSA, VGRGT, Response of the government of Danish West Indies to proposal of Committee on Slave Trade for loans to planters, September 21, 1792, p. 1.

[6]Allerunterthänigste Vorstellung, March 19, 1792, p. 1.

allow a certain number of slaves obtained by means of the loan to be written off so that their owners could use them to obtain new loans elsewhere. Walterstorff agreed that the planters should not receive loans larger than the sum they could offer as security for the loans, but he said nothing about the committee's proposal that each planter participating in the loan plan be required to maintain a stipulated number of slaves, for this must have seemed unrealistic to him, as an epidemic or a drought could at any time decimate the slave population on a plantation.[7]

The committee wanted the loans to be available to both less well-to-do planters and wealthy ones (Die Vorschusse werden nicht blos ganz unvermögender sondern auch vermögenderen zugestanden), so long as all applicants for the loan intended to buy slaves to improve production on their plantations.[8] Walterstorff's response was to caution against making loans to poor planters who lacked the wherewithal to care adequately for their slaves.

> That which more than anything else makes the slaves' conditions harsh and their fate so varied, is that they sometimes become the property of a poor man who can barely provide food for himself and is plagued by his creditors, so that he in turn is forced to plague his slaves with overwork and, what is worse, to let them go without adequate food and clothing. Politically as well as morally, in so far as one seeks to promote an increase in cultivation and to improve the

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[7]Response of government of Danish West Indies to proposal of Committee on Slave Trade for loan to planters, September 21, 1792, p. 1.

[8]DSA, VGRGT, Allerunterthänigste Vorstellung, March 19, 1792, p. 1.

> circumstances of the slaves, it seems advisable to give preference to assisting prosperous and well-to-do planters . . . .
>
> Politically considered, it is not wise to encourage poor persons to become planters or to parcel out plantations. At the very least one ought to use great care in supporting the purchase of slaves by poor persons; one should be convinced not only that such a poor man's land could be improved if he obtained more slaves, but also that he was a man who would treat his slaves well and had the means to provide them with the necessities.[9]

Walterstorff's favoritism toward wealthy planters was understandable, as he had become one of them since arriving as a government official, and the big planters were the group which had to be induced to accept the Crown's decision in favor of abolition. Only they, or the slaves, could cause trouble. Walterstorff's statement that it was "politically" unwise to help poor whites buy slaves was probably motivated by fear of the dangerous situation that might arise from mistreatment of a large number of new African slaves.

The committee suggested that the average loan for buying a slave should be 200 rigsdaler (oder auf einzeine Neger vielleicht i dieser Proportion: 260-210-180-150). No distinction would be made between rich and poor planters in deciding on the sum.[10] Walterstorff, however, suggested that the average loans should be slightly higher than suggested by the committee. Arguing that the loan sum must be adjusted to the "quality [beskaffenhed]" of the slave in question, he recommended as a general guideline that 250 rigsdaler vestindisk

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[9]Response of government of Danish West Indies to proposal of Committee on the Slave Trade for loan to planters, September 21, 1792, p. 2.

[10]Allerunterthänigste Vorstellung, March 19, 1792, p. 1.

courant be set as the average sum loaned for purchase of an adult female slave from 14 to 22 years of age; 225 rigsdaler for an adult male not more than 32 years old; 200 rigsdaler for an adolescent woman [halvvoxen Qvinde] or for older women [Koner] from 25 to 35; 180 rigsdaler for an adolescent male from 12 to 18; and 150 rigsdaler for children of both sexes from 7 to 12. These sums would not cover the entire purchase price of slaves in the various categories, but planters who were unable to pay part of the price themselves should not be encouraged to buy slaves, for their credit was probably poor, and "the Crown would be exposed to a rather certain loss." Walterstorff added: "It is universally of greater advantage for the colonies and cultivation that a wealthy rather than a poor man increases his plantation's labor force [Overalt er det til større Nytte for Landet og Culturen at en velhavende end at en fattig Mand forøger sin Plantages Besaetning.]"[11]

The committee instructed the colonial government to recommend the most appropriate ratio of male to female slaves on the plantations and to try to purchase new slaves, in so far as possible, so that this ideal ratio would be reached, in line with the long-term goal of a population capable of sustaining itself.[12] Walterstorff foresaw a serious problem, however, in obtaining a larger number of female slaves

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[11]Response of government of Danish West Indies to proposal of Committee on the Slave Trade for loan to planters, September 21, 1792, p. 3.

[12]Allerunterthänigste Vorstellung, March 19, 1792, p. 2.

than males; male slaves were more readily available on the Guinea Coast because of a number of factors, including their more frequent enslavement for crimes and debts and their being captured in war.[13]

Walterstorff suggested that the loan provided an opportunity to give special encouragement to planters to induce them to treat their slaves better: By raising the interest rate charged the planters for loans from four and a half to five per cent, enough money could be obtained to allow the colonial government to offer an award of 200 rigsdaler for the best sketch of a hospital and nursery (Barselstue), with the winning sketch to be selected by local government officials. Planters who modeled their hospitals and nurseries after the award-winner would in turn be granted 50 to 300 rigsdaler. Furthermore, female slaves could be given two rigsdaler when their children were six weeks, six months, and twelve months old, in order to encourage slave mothers to take better care of their infants.[14] Walterstorff believed 1,000 slaves would have to be purchased each year prior to abolition. He calculated that, over the ten-year period, the Crown would have to loan the planters 1,305,658 rigsdaler vestindisk courant.[15] This sum was later reduced by the colonial government to 1,302,644 rigsdaler vestindisk

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[13]Response of colonial government, p. 4. According to J.D. Fage, "Slavery and the Slave Trade in the Context of African History," Journal of African History, X (1969), 400, only one-third of slaves exported were women.

[14]Response of colonial government, p. 4.

[15]Ibid., pp. 4, 6, and 8.

courant.[16]

The committee insisted that slaves obtained by means of the loan were not in turn to be used as security for obtaining the loans, and, furthermore, were not to be used as security when borrowing from any other source. In computing the number of slaves on a plantation, house slaves and others not engaged in productive labor were to be excluded [alle Neger die als Huusneger oder sonst der Plantagen Arbeit entzogen werden, sind als Abgang zu rechnen . . .).[17]

Though Walterstorff had suggested a need for 1,000 new slaves each year until 1803, the Committee on the Slave Trade wanted an accurate census of the slave population as well as surveys made of the needs of each planter in order to determine as precisely as possible how many more slaves were needed. The final plan for loans to the planters obviously was dependent upon the number of new slaves needed.

Peter Lotharius Oxholm, Stadshauptmand on St. Croix, had arrived as a royal official in 1779 and had married into the planter class, acquiring two plantations.[18] He did most of the work involved

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[16]DSA, VGRGT, Dokumenter vedkommende Kommissionen til Negerhandelens bedre Indretning og Ophaevelse, Bemaerkninger i Anledning af den til Negerhandelens Ophaevelse nedsatte Commissions Grundsaetninger til en Laane Plan for de vestindiske Plantere, from government of Danish West Indies to Committee on the Slave Trade, St. Croix, December 29, 1792, p. 6.

[17]Allerunterthängiste Vorstellung, March 19, 1792, p. 2.

[18]Dansk Biografisk Leksikon, XII (1898), 507-08.

in gathering census data on the slave population of the islands. On August 1, 1792, he sent the committee a twenty-four page preliminary report on the slave population and the loan. He wrote that the only way of obtaining a reliable census of the slaves was to demand of each planter an accurate list of his slaves broken down by sex and age and an estimate of how many more slaves were needed of each sex. The lists used for purposes of the head tax were not helpful, because they did not differentiate between men and women and because the persons who compiled most of the lists often didn't bother to mention the yearly change in the age of the slaves. A new census was therefore essential before anything definitive could be said about the slave population.[19]

Oxholm argued that it was essential that the planters be allowed to use the slaves purchased with the loans as security for the loans, because most of the planters' property was already mortgaged, and there was no alternative to using the slaves, distasteful as this was to the committee. He added that the loan committee in the West Indies should be left free to reach agreement with each of the planters concerning the schedule for repaying the loan, and that it was impossible for a planter to guarantee he would maintain the number of slaves on his plantation--"he can only do his best."[20]

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[19]DSA, VGRGT, Vice Stadshauptmand Oxholms Anmaerkninger ved den kongelige Commissions til Negerhandelens bedre Indretning paa de vestindiske Ejlande og Kysten Guinea, dens Pro Memoria af 7 April, 1792, efter ordere, August 1, 1792, p. 1.

[20]Ibid., pp. 3-7.

Oxholm said the planters could not be expected to maintain a balance between births and deaths among their slaves, though they might achieve such a goal in the future. In the previous ten years, he noted, 4,694 slaves had been born, but 8,770 had died; the excess of 4,076 deaths over births meant that, on the average, more than 400 more slaves died each year than were born. Only in 1784 did births exceed deaths, and then merely by thirty-three. A two-per-cent excess of deaths over births, which seemed unavoidable "under present circumstances [efter nuvaerende Indretning]," meant that this excess would amount to four or five thousand slaves during the next ten years. So, he argued, at least ten or twelve thousand more slaves had to be brought into the islands; 1,500,000 rigsdaler in loans would, Oxholm felt, be sufficient.[21]

The loans should be repaid within five to ten years, depending on the financial status of the buyer, because the slaves, whom Oxholm considered the only possible security for the loans, were such an "uncertain form of property [uvis Ejendom]." Only very special circumstances might require terms of repayment that would exceed ten years.[22]

The St. Croix Burger Council agreed with Oxholm that, until reliable data had been collected from the planters, it was impossible to make a final decision as to how many more slaves would be needed

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[21] Ibid., pp. 7, 18, and 8.

[22] Ibid., p. 19.

before 1803. "However, until this information is gathered, we think, according to a rough calculation [en løs Calcul], that ten thousand slaves . . . , or approximately one thousand per year during the next ten years, would be sufficient for attaining his majesty's intended purpose."[23] The sum required for this would be 300,000 rigsdaler a year. The Burger Council believed this estimate of the needed number of new slaves was not exaggerated because so many of the new slaves "will be lost, in spite of the best care, before they are seasoned," and there will be "the normal population decrease among those already seasoned [den naturlige Afgang i Antallet imellem de Saisonnerede]."[24]

The burger councils of St. Thomas and St. John were consulted by the royal council on St. Thomas under Commandant Thomas Malleville, who then sent his report to St. Croix. Each planter has been asked how many more slaves he needed, and the total was 3,471 more slaves for St. Thomas and St. John at a cost of about 694,200 rigsdaler. Malleville argued, as had Oxholm, that the newly purchased slaves themselves were the only security the planters could offer in return for the loans, as nearly all the plantations on St. Thomas and St. John were mortgaged at least once.[25]

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[23]DSA, VGRGT, Pro Memoria from St. Croix Burger Council to government of Danish West Indies, September 5, 1792, pp. 1-2.

[24]Ibid., p. 2.

[25]DSA, VGRGT, Erindringer ved Laan Planen, from Raadet paa St. Thomas to government of Danish West Indies, November 19, 1792.

Malleville feared that the price of African slaves, then averaging 325 to 358 rigsdaler vestindisk courant, might increase dramatically because of the planters' need to obtain as many slaves as possible prior to abolition, "cost what they will."[26]

Oxholm, once the new population lists for St. Croix had been received from the planters, calculated that there were in the three Danish islands 15,403 field slaves engaged in cultivating sugar and 1,673 in cotton. "With these we have, though with difficulty, mastered the work; but both cultivation and population have suffered because of the labor shortage." It would have been impossible "to have reached our goal, if we had not allowed our cane to grow without replanting for six to seven years as a rule [have naaet vores Maal, var det ikke fordi vi lade vore Rør ratunne fra 6 til 7 Aar i Almindelighed]." But in the future the sugar plants would have to be replaced more often as the soil lost its fertility, and more fertilizing would be needed. More slaves, therefore, would soon be required to work the fields presently under cultivation.[27]

Because of the high mortality rate among new slaves (Bosaler), from 10,000 to 12,000 slaves would have to be imported if 8,000 were to be added to the population by 1803. Indeed, he continued, it would be best to import 1,500 slaves a year for the first five

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[26]Ibid., p. 3.

[27]DSA, VGRGT, Dokumenter vedkommende Kommissionen til Negerhandelens bedre Indretning og Ophaevelse, Bemaerkninger ved hosfølgende Tabellen over St. Croixs Dyrkning og Besaetning, from P. L. Oxholm to government of Danish West Indies, St. Croix, December 27, 1792, p. 2.

years and 1,200 a year for the last five during which the slave trade was permitted, which would bring 13,500 new slaves to the Danish islands.[28] The more thought Oxholm gave to the matter, the greater the number of slaves he felt were needed.

The lists submitted by the St. Croix planters indicated a need for 6,309 additional slaves.[29] Oxholm believed this figure was too low, for he was certain "there were many planters who had the means and the will to buy slaves, but whose pride would not allow them to admit they needed more slaves . . . ." This pride had, he felt, led them to deny that their plantations suffered a labor shortage. Others had, perhaps because of a "somewhat stingy disposition," failed to indicate their real needs. Oxholm concluded: "One can, I believe, assume that 8,000 slaves are needed for the most profitable cultivation of the island [Landets fordeelagtigste Dyrkelse]."[30]

The colonial government, in turn, believed Oxholm's estimate of 8,000 was too low. The government said it found Oxholm's argument that the planters' pride had led them to underestimate their need for slaves very convincing, and then noted that the St. Croix Burger

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[28] Ibid., pp. 2-7.

[29] DSA, VGRGT, Dokumenter vedkommende Kommissionen til Negerhandelens bedre Indretning og Ophaevelse, P. L. Oxholms General Extract af Øen St. Croixs Bebyggelse og Besaetning af Creaturer og Negre, December 21, 1792, p. 3. The planters said they needed 1,554 adult male slaves' 1,774 adult females, 1,346 boys, and 1,635 girls.

[30] Ibid., p. 2.

Council wanted 10,000 more slaves brought to the island.[31] The colonial government insisted that repayments on the loans should be ten per cent a year rather than seven-and-a-half per cent, as suggested by the committee. The planters should not be given too much time to repay the loan, for they "never pay more than they are forced to pay, and, besides, they generally die in debt."[32]

The colonial government reflected the opposition of the planter class to the Danish slave trade company, Pingel, Meyer, and Praetorius, which had held a monopoly on the sale of slaves in the Danish islands prior to the abolition edict, by arguing against any kind of contract between the company and the Crown for the delivery of slaves from Africa. The planters must not be bound in any way to purchase slaves from a particular company, for "reasonable and reliable [fornuftige og vederhaeftige]" planters would insist on seeing what they purchase and on selecting their new slaves according to the sex and age group most needed on their plantations. One clause in Pingel, Meyer, and Praetorius's contract was singled out as particularly odious. It read: "That the emaciation [Magerhed] or the poor appearance [of the slaves] which is a result of their transportation on the ship can not serve as an excuse for rejecting or refusing to buy a slave." This, said the colonial government,

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[31]DSA, VGRGT, Dokumenter vedkommende Kommissionen til Negerhandelens bedre Indretning og Ophaevelse, Bemaerkninger i Anledning af den til Negerhandelens Ophaevelse nedsatte Commissions Grundsaetninger til en Laane Plan for de vestindiske Plantere, from government of Danish West Indies to Committee on the Slave Trade, St. Croix, December 29, 1792, p. 1.

[32]Ibid., p. 9.

demonstrated the difficulties involved for the planters in their relationship with the company:

> Anyone who has ever purchased or owned a slave knows that emaciation or poor appearance in every instance must be considered, not only because there is always a risk that a slave whose health has been severely undermined during the journey from Africa will never recover fully in America, where climate and food are different from Africa, but also because the buyer will have to pay for extra food [for an emaciated slave] and will lose several months' work from the slave before the latter has recovered his strength.[33]

The government complained also that Pingel, Meyer, and Praetorius kept slaves several months on the company's ships along the Guinea Coast, waiting until a full cargo was on board before sailing to the West Indies, and thereby undermined the health of the slaves. Furthermore, the ships used were not properly outfitted for carrying slaves and the provisions on board were insufficient for the long voyage. The government praised English slave ships for supplying healthier slaves than their Danish counterparts, "especially since the improvements in the slave trade by the English Parliament," a reference to Dolben's Act.[34] Ships "have arrived in the English islands with 400 to 500 slaves without losing a single one during the

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[33]Ibid., pp. 14-15.

[34]Dolben's Act of 1788 sought to ameliorate the existence of slaves on board the ships by providing limitations on the number of slaves that could be carried per ton and paying premiums to the captain and ship's doctor when the mortality rate was below three per cent. It reduced the death rate on English slave ships by more than half. See Roger Anstey, The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition, 1760-1810 (London: The MacMillan Press, 1975), pp. 30-31, 69-70, 419-21.

voyage."[35]

The government feared that the Crown might give special advantages to Pingel, Meyer, and Praetorius, putting the planters at a disadvantage. After all, Schimmelmann was a secret investor in the company, the report on abolition by the Committee on the Slave Trade had suggested the possibility of a contract which would help the company continue to sell slaves in the islands, and the committee had mentioned such a contract in its preliminary proposal on the loans for buying slaves.[36] The colonial government insisted that any arrangement with a Danish company be accompanied by safeguards which would assist the Danish West Indies and would provide benefits to the planters there comparable to those enjoyed in the English islands when it came to buying healthy slaves at fair prices.[37]

The Committee on the Slave Trade, having studied the reports sent to it from the West Indies, finished its proposal for the loan plan and sent it to the Council of State on April 16, 1793. The committee said that the reports it had received from the colonial

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[35]Bemaerkninger i Anledning af den til Negerhandelens Ophaevelse nedsatte Commissions Grundsaetninger til en Laane Plan for de vestindiske Plantere, p. 15.

[36]DSA, VGRGT, Om Negerhandelens Afskaffelse, Allerunterthänigste Vorstellung of Committee on the Slave Trade, in its report on abolition of the slave trade, December 28, 1791, p. 62; Allerunterthänigste Vorstellung of Committee on Slave Trade, concerning loans to planters for purchase of new slaves, March 19, 1792, p. 3.

[37]Bemaerkninger i Anledning af den til Negerhandelens Ophaevelse nedsatte Commissions Grundsaetninger til en Laane Plan for de vestindiske Plantere, pp. 16-17.

government, the burger councils on St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix, and from Oxholm were in agreement with the committee's own principles. The committee had "after further reflection found several of the points made in the reports to be of such quality that there was no alternative but to approve them."[38]

The committee said its hope to avoid letting the planters mortgage their newly purchased slaves to the Crown as security for the loans had been shown to be impossible to carry out, as the planters' current indebtedness meant there was no alternative. The colonial government had convinced the committee that the yearly loan repayments by the planters should be ten per cent rather than the seven-and-one-half per cent suggested by the committee, for this would allow more of the loan fund to be used again for more loans. The sum allotted for the loans was that requested by the colonial government--1,302,644 rigsdaler vestindisk courant (or 1,042,116 rigsdaler dansk courant.) The committee also agreed with the colonial government's proposal that the interest rate on the loans should be raised from four-and-a-half per cent to five per cent so that the extra half per cent "could be used for some useful measures connected with the loan plan."[39]

The loan committee in the West Indies was a combination of

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[38]DSA, VGRGT, Dokumenter vedkommende Kommissionen til Negerhandelens bedre Indretning og Ophaevelse, Allerunderdanigst Forestilling on loans to planters by Committee on the Slave Trade, April 16, 1793, p. 2.

[39]Ibid., pp. 2-3.

all the members of the government and the Stadshauptmand on St. Croix and of the royal council and the Stadshauptmand for St. Thomas and St. John. The loan committee was to determine the number of slaves purchased on each island and by each planter. The Committee on the Slave Trade agreed with Walterstorff's interpretation of its own rather vague proposal in the March 19, 1792, preliminary draft of the loan plan sent to St. Croix, in that it said slaves could be purchased for the purpose of expanding production on plantations where a labor shortage had retarded cultivation of the available acreage, but not for extending cultivation to "land previously uncultivated which is still covered with woods and bushes [hidindtil udyrkede Straekninger, som endnu ligge i Skov og Busk]."[40]

The committee agreed with Walterstorff's proposal as to how much money should be loaned to planters for buying slaves in each of the five categories listed by him in his report of September 21, 1792 (see above, pp. 164-165). But the committee did not accede to his suggestion that wealthy planters should enjoy preference over poor ones in the granting of loans, insisting instead that no distinction was to be drawn among those seeking loans. Yet Walterstorff, as governor of the Danish West Indies, had been placed

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[40]DSA, VGRGT, Dokumenter vedkommende Kommissionen til Negerhandelens bedre Indretning og Ophaevelse, Plan hvorefter de til endeel Negeres Anskaffelse gjørende Laan i Vestindien skal indrettes, April 16, 1793, p. 2. Obviously the land not yet cultivated on three such densely populated islands was land that was unlikely to ever be cultivated profitably. In 1792, out of 51,873 acres on St. Croix, 3,168 1/2 were listed as unused (i Skov og Busk). See Oxholm's General Extract of December 21, 1792, p. 2.

in charge of making the on-the-spot decisions as to which planters were to receive loans, so he would in effect be able to favor wealthy planters, provided he avoided arousing enough opposition to call his actions to the attention of the Committee on the Slave Trade. And the committee did include a sentence in the loan plan which said the loan committee in the islands could make exceptions to the rule that all planters should be treated equally if such exceptions were warranted by special circumstances.[41]

The committee continued to insist that planters who obtained loans for buying slaves should pledge that they would maintain the slave population of their plantations for as long as the slave trade remained open. Those planters who failed to do this would not be eligible for new loans. The committee hoped thereby to force the planters to improve the treatment of slaves in general and the newborn in particular, for children henceforth born on the plantations could be used to offset the expected high first-year death rate of the new slaves from Africa.[42]

Though it endorsed Walterstorff's suggestion that premiums be awarded for the best sketches of plantation hospitals and nurseries, the committee made no mention of Walterstorff's proposal to award premiums to slave mothers for successfully caring for their babies. But it did note that the income derived from raising the

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[41]Plan hvorefter de til endeel Negeres anskaffelse gjørende Laan i Vestindien skal indrettes, p. 3.

[42]Ibid., p. 4.

interest rate on the loans from four-and-a-half to five per cent could also be used for those "projects which appear best able to promote the growth and maintenance of the slave population [Gienstande, som synes bedst at kunde befordre Negernes Formeerelse og Vedligeholdelse]."[43]

Oxholm had cautioned that "Those who bring slaves [to the Danish islands] will be Englishmen or Americans who can have no use for Danish currency, but will require produce or Sterling."[44] The committee accordingly made available bills of exchange which could be drawn on banks in Amsterdam, London, and Hamburg, though the planter's debt to the Crown for the loans would be counted in rigsdaler at the prevailing exchange rate.[45]

The committee wanted the West Indian loan committee to send yearly reports from St. Croix on the loans granted during each year and to specify the security obtained in return. It also wanted accurate data on births and deaths on those plantations whose owners had obtained loans.[46]

The royal resolution approving the loan plan and the creation of a loan committee in the West Indies was issued the day after the plan was sent to the Council of State. The resolution said

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[43]Ibid., p. 5.

[44]DSA, VGRGT, Vice Stadshauptmand Oxholms Anmaerkninger, August 1, 1792, p. 21.

[45]Plan . . . til endeel Negeres anskaffelse, pp. 7-8.

[46]Ibid., p. 8.

that one per cent of the interest paid on the loans by the planters would be divided so as to provide half a per cent for covering costs of administering the loan, with the other half per cent allotted equally to the royal treasury in the West Indies and for premiums for the projects proposed by the committee to help the slaves.[47]

The plan was sent to the West Indies a few days later, and the colonial government had it published in the St. Croix Gazette. A bookkeeper and a secretary were hired to help administer the loan, and the loan committee proceeded to accept requests for loans.[48] By October 1, 1793, the loan committee had received requests from planters for loans to buy 790 slaves and had, "after careful investigation of each applicant's request, . . . and the results that could be expected from granting each loan," approved loans for the purchase of 623 slaves.[49]

The loan plan was greeted enthusiastically in the West Indies, with the only reservations expressed about it focusing on the risks of bringing in so many Africans in a short period of time. Oxholm

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[47]DSA, VGRGT, Dokumenter vedkommende Kommissionen til Negerhandelens bedre Indretning og Ophaevelse, Royal Resolution approving loan plan for the purchase of new slaves, April 17, 1793, p. 11.

[48]DSA, VGRGT, Dokumenter vedkommende Kommissionen til Negerhandelens bedre Indretning og Ophaevelse, Pro Memoria to Committee on the Slave Trade from Commissionen paa St. Croix for de til Planternes Understøttelse bestemte Laan, St. Croix, August 31, 1793, pp. 1-2.

[49]DSA, VGRGT, Dokumenter vedkommende Kommissionen til Negerhandelens bedre Indretning og Ophaevelse, Pro Memoria from Commissionen paa St. Croix for det til Planternes Understøttelse bestemte Laan, to Directionen for den vestindiske Gields Liquidation, St. Croix, October 14, 1793, p. 1.

in his report of August 1, 1792, had noted that "no planter wants to obtain too many new slaves at once, as that involves too many difficulties, including getting them adjusted to their labor, the climate and food."[50] Commandant Malleville on St. Thomas in a report on the proposed loan plan wrote: "Experience has taught that, in general, buying a large number of African slaves [Bosal Negere] at one time involves much danger."[51]

The loan was not the only "reform" connected with preparation for abolition and mentioned in the royal resolution of February 24, 1792, and the abolition edict of March 16, 1792. One approach to enlarging the field labor force which had been urged by the Committee on the Slave Trade in its December 28, 1791, report on the slave trade and by the Council of State in the royal resolution of February 24, 1792, was a reduction in the number of house slaves, who were considered unproductive adornments which the planters maintained for purposes of social status. Both the committee and the Council of State had favored a special tax on house slaves, the abolition edict had set a date for removing the head tax on female field slaves but had not altered the tax on female house slaves, and the General Customs Department's letter of instructions to the West Indian government had requested a report on house slaves and

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[50] DSA, VGRGT, Dokumenter vedkommende Kommissionen til Negerhandelens bedre Indretning og Ophaevelse, Vice Stadshauptmand Oxholms Anmaerkninger, St. Croix, August 1, 1792, p. 4.

[51] DSA, VGRGT, Dokumenter vedkommende Kommissionen til Negerhandelens bedre Indretning og Ophaevelse, Report from Raadet paa St. Thomas to colonial government on St. Croix, St. Thomas, November 19, 1792, p. 2.

recommendations for an extra tax on them, in hopes of prodding the planters to make more efficient use of their labor force.

Oxholm believed that instances where planters took slaves from the fields to work as house slaves were few. He said the planters were too mindful of their own interests to do that and added that during the harvest season, when as many hands as could be found were needed, planters often "chased their house slaves out" to help in the fields and at the sugar mill. He added that, unfortunately, there would always be some waste in manpower allocation which the government would remain powerless to correct.[52]

Walterstorff countered the concern in Copenhagen about the high number of house slaves by arguing that large numbers were needed in order to keep the planters' homes clean, for unlike Europe, "here reigns the greatest conceivable cleanliness." Since doors and windows were left open to let cooling breezes through, dust accumulated quickly, and many hands were required for dusting and polishing the furniture. Slaves also were required to look after the master's children. Furthermore, no slave would perform more than one specific duty: "The slaves are universally lazy and three servants here accomplish less than one in Europe [Overalt ere Negerne meget lade og tre Domestiguer her forretter ikke saa meget som een i Europa]."[53] Walterstorff admitted a tendency for the number of house

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[52]Vice Stadshauptmand Oxholms Anmaerkninger, pp. 19-20.

[53]DSA, VGRGT, Dokumenter vedkommende Kommissionen til Negerhandelens bedre Indretning og Ophaevelse, Report by Walterstorff, St. Croix, September 21, 1792, pp. 9-10. In the United States, too, house slaves were considered, rightly or wrongly, by their masters

slaves to grow as female house slaves kept their children in the great house so that, after a few years, "one can find oneself encircled by a multitude of useless persons [en Hoben unytige Mennesker] who cost no small amount to feed and clothe." But he did not believe a higher head tax on "excessive [overflødige]" house slaves would have much influence in reducing their ranks, for the masters could easily find ways of avoiding the tax.[54]

The St. Croix Burger Council believed four or five house slaves, not including children under twelve, were needed by a single white person: one to do the wash, one to cook, one to serve as man servant, one as "a woman in the house [en Negerinde i Huuset]," and one to care for the master's horse.[55] The royal council on St. Thomas, expressing its own views as well as those of the burger councils on St. Thomas and St. John, argued that it was almost impossible to determine the number of house slaves a family needed, as the number of children in the family, the income of the family, and its place of residence could change from year to year. "We have, therefore, for the time being been unable . . . to determine the number of house slaves needed." Perhaps, the council added, it would be possible to conduct a survey of house slaves in January,

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to be "insufferably lazy, incompetent, dishonest, and impudent." See Eugene D. Genovese, Roll Jordan Roll; The World the Slaves Made (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), pp. 334ff.

[54]Report by Walterstorff, p. 11.

[55]Pro Memoria from St. Croix Burger Council, September 5, 1792, p. 2.

when the tax rolls were prepared.[56]

In his study of the slave population of St. Croix in 1792, Oxholm found there were 1,320 house slaves, 877 of them women and girls. He thought it appropriate for a small family to have six house slaves or for there to be two house slaves for each white person on St. Croix. Oxholm supported his belief by providing an elaborate list of the tasks allotted to house slaves and emphasizing the need for greater cleanliness in the warm West Indian climate than was necessary and prevalent in Denmark.[57] Since there were approximately 4,000 whites on St. Croix, there was no excess of house slaves. In fact, it seemed that more were needed, as many of the free colored kept house slaves, and as the latter were included in the above total of 1,320 for the island, the number of house slaves available for the white population was even lower than it appeared in the census.[58]

The colonial government concluded that the head tax should be doubled on excessive house slaves, with five slaves allowed for each home; slaves under 6 or over 50 should not be counted. Mulatto women kept as house slaves should also be taxed double, for "they

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[56]DSA, VGRGT, Dokumenter vedkommende Kommissionen til Negerhandelens bedre Indretning og Ophaevelse, Pro Memoria from Royal Council on St. Thomas, November 9, 1792, pp. 4-5.

[57]P. L. Oxholm, Bemaerkninger ved hosfølgende Tabeller over St. Croixs Dyrkning og Besaetning, St. Croix, December 27, 1792, pp. 5-6.

[58]P. L. Oxholm, General Extract af Øen St. Croixs Bebyggelse og Besaetning af Creaturer og Negere, St. Croix, December 21, 1792, pp. 1-2.

serve vanity more than any useful or necessary purpose." The government also advised against any tax on slaves who were hired out to work as artisans, for these were "useful people for the colony who in respect to their condition hardly feel that they are slaves."[59] The colonial government obviously did not relish the idea of extra taxes on house slaves, but it did not, as C. A. Trier indicated, deliberately misinterpret its instructions from Copenhagen when it concluded that higher taxes on house slaves were to be imposed only on "excessive" house slaves, for the Crown had stipulated clearly that taxes were not to be raised on house slaves that were necessary for the operation of a household.[60] Yet the colonial government did, by placing each white family's basic need for house slaves at a level so high that only a few very wealthy families would be subject to additional taxes, seek to ward off bothersome interference from the home government, interference motivated by the hope of improving the productivity of the slave labor force.

The General Customs Department insisted, however, that the colonial government prepare a more detailed proposal for taxing house slaves, as it was unsatisfied with the government's previous efforts.[61] The government protested that such a task was "very

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[59]DSA, VGRGT, Vestindisk Journal, 1793, No. 139, Pro Memoria from government of Danish West Indies to General Customs Department, December 31, 1792, p. 3.

[60]See C. A. Trier, "Det dansk-vestindiske Negerindførselsforubd of 1792," Historisk Tidskrift, 7th Series, V (1904-05), 460.

[61]DSA, VGRGT, Om Negerhandelens Afskaffelse, Letter from General Customs Department to government of Danish West Indies, May 11, 1793, p. 1.

difficult" and that it was "quite impossible" to produce a proposal which was based on convincing evidence. It was extremely difficult to distinguish between the number of house slaves that was necessary and that which was excessive for each family. To its proposal of December 31, 1792, the colonial government now added a plan dividing the number of house slaves into five classes, with the head tax remaining unchanged in the first group, consisting of homes with from one to four slaves, and increasing until, for slaves in homes with twenty or more house slaves, the head tax would be more than two-and-a-half times the normal one.[62] This was the last report on house slaves, and the General Customs Department allowed the issue of extra taxes on house slaves to fade.

In addition to trying to improve the productivity of the slave labor force by reducing the number of house slaves, the Committee on the Slave Trade and subsequently the Council of State wanted to increase the birth rate and lower the death rate among the slaves, for unless a balance between births and deaths could be achieved, abolition would lead to a steadily diminishing number of workers after January 1, 1803, with prenicious consequences for the colonial economy and the Danish sugar industry. Closely connected

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[62]DSA, VGRGT, Om Negerhandelens Afskaffelse, Pro Memoria from government of Danish West Indies to General Customs Department, September 4, 1793, pp. 1-4. The government provided a list of house slaves in Christiansted which showed there were: 238 homes with 1-4 slaves; 93 homes with 5-9 slaves; 36 homes with 10-14 slaves; 18 homes with 15-19 slaves; 12 homes with 20-29 slaves; 6 homes with 30-39 slaves; 1 home with 48 slaves; 1 with 51 slaves and 1 with 81 slaves.

with the goal of increasing the birth rate was the need to increase the number of female slaves, to improve the stability of slave marriages, and to discourage fornication and adultery by using the Moravian Brethren to provide more widespread instruction in religion. The colonial government, the burger councils, and the Moravians responded with detailed suggestions as to how the goals of the Crown could be achieved or, in some cases, why they could not.

Regarding improved treatment of slaves in order to lower the death rate, Oxholm wrote that "a truly humane planter will never lose sight" of the need to supply his slaves with sufficient food and clothing, to provide them with proper care when they are ill, and to maintain enough slaves to guarantee that they will not be overworked. "Self-interest, habit, and charity, the latter made generally prevalent by the influence of the climate, are guarantees [against mistreatment]."[63]

Walterstorff pointed to the difficulties posed by the vagaries of weather and the problems faced by new slaves from Africa in adjusting to a new climate. During dry years the slaves' provision grounds provided little if any food, and there was a shortage of good water. Though there was not much hope for improvement when a drought struck, he believed there was a strong likelihood that the mortality rate would decline once the slave trade was abolished, because the population would then increasingly become one that was

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[63]Vice Stadshauptmands Oxholms Anmaerkninger, August 1, 1792, p. 8.

used to living and working in the West Indies, and thereafter the "number of deaths would fall, coming into a more suitable proportion with the number of births and eventually falling below the latter."[64] Neither Walterstorff nor Oxholm believed mistreatment of the slaves by the planters was a problem; they were themselves Danish government officials who had become planters after arriving on St. Croix and considered, not surprisingly, the death rate of the slaves to be largely unaffected by the behavior of the masters.

Using the tax rolls for St. Croix, Oxholm provided information on slave deaths which indicated a lower mortality rate for slaves living in and near the towns, Christiansted and Frederiksted, with the highest death rate found in those parts of the island where the soil was most fertile and, therefore, where sugar cultivation was most intensive. In Dronningens Qvarteer, one slave out of every fourteen and a half had died in the previous year; in Kongens Qvarteer, one out of every thirteen. In Christiansted, on the other hand, there was only one slave death for every seventy-seven slaves. Oxholm was struck by the contrast between population growth in the islands and growth in Europe, for in Europe a surplus of births generally occurred in the countryside rather than in the cities. He wrote that, on St. Croix, slaves in the cities had less work to do, and young children were better cared for than on the plantations. Slaves on plantations near the towns benefited from being able to improve their living standards by selling eggs, peas, chickens, and

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[64]Report by Walterstorff, September 21, 1792, p. 13.

hay for clothing and a greater variety of food.[65]

The low ratio of female to male slaves was a problem which had concerned the Committee on the Slave Trade and led it to recommend that planters be encouraged to purchase female slaves; the abolition edict sought to accomplish this by granting various tax incentives to those buying females. The attitude of the committee had been based on a study of the slave population on plantations mortgaged to the Crown, a study which led to an exaggerated view of the shortage of slave women because the plantations studied were not representative of the plantations as a whole. Fearing a long delay and the risk of arousing unwelcome curiosity if it sought extensive data on the slave population before reaching a decision on abolition, the committee had been forced to rely on incomplete data in reaching some of its conclusions. Only after deciding to abolish the slave trade did the Danish government, through the General Customs Department, request of the colonial government data on the ratio of female to male slaves and a report on the ratio considered most desirable by the planters and most conducive to increasing the birth rate.

Oxholm argued in favor of importing as many female slaves as possible in order to accomplish an immediate and dramatic increase in births. He obviously gave little consideration to the Crown's emphasis on the need to improve family life among the slaves as a

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[65]Vice Stadshauptmands Oxholms Anmaerkninger, August 1, 1792, pp. 13-15.

means of improving the birth rate: he believed that, by providing the plantations with an excess of females, population growth "will probably benefit from an increased desire in the male slaves occasioned by the presence of different objects to arouse their passions to a greater degree [formodentlig vilde vinde ved den forøgede lyst i Maendene, naar forandrede Objekter opvakte deres Lidenskaber til en højere Grad]."[66]

The royal council on St. Thomas pointed out the contradiction implicit in the Crown's goal of fostering stable slave marriages while at the same time stimulating the importation of many more female than male slaves. It argued that the planters should be allowed to buy the slaves they felt they needed for the successful operation of their plantations without the government imposing taxes that penalized them for buying male slaves. Slave marriages, the council felt, would benefit from having an approximately equal number of males and females on the plantations, though having a few more males than females on each plantation, as was the case at present, should not prove harmful. The council warned that "if there were many more women than men [on the plantations], a natural result would be that a man would have more than one wife," a situation in direct conflict with the goal of promoting morality and improving family life among the slaves.[67]

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[66]Ibid., p. 17.

[67]Report of Raadet paa St. Thomas to government of Danish West Indies, November 19, 1792, pp. 7-8.

Oxholm concluded after the slave census had been taken in the fall of 1792 that the proper ratio of the sexes on the plantations ought to be two women for every man. He proceeded to praise the female field slaves, whom he described as "the steadiest and most faithful workers." Certain tasks, such as skilled work at the sugar mills, were best done by men, but labor in the fields, involving planting and cutting the cane and carrying it to the mill, could be done by women just as well as by men. He urged that female slaves comprise from two-thirds to three-fourths of the slaves imported.[68] His insistence on the need to import many more women than men was not in accordance with the reported needs of the St. Croix planters, however. (See p. 172, footnote 29.)

The Committee on the Slave Trade in its report of December 28, 1791, had concluded that the low birth rate among the slaves was a greater hindrance to population growth than the death rate, which it had concluded was not abnormally high, except for new slaves during their year of seasoning. The royal resolution of February 24, 1792, had emphasized strengthening family life among the slaves, an act which, it was assumed, would result in the birth of more slave children and, more importantly, in a higher rate of survival among the newborn. But in order to encourage slaves to marry and build stable family units, the Crown had taken the seemingly necessary step of banning the separation of married slaves

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[68]Bemaerkninger ved hosfølgende Tabeller over St. Croixs Dyrkning og Besaetning, December 27, 1792, pp. 1-2 and p. 6.

or of a child under six from its mother. This prohibition, if carried out, would involve interfering with the planters' property rights. The teachers who were to move freely about the plantations to listen to the grievances of the slaves and to instruct them in religion posed an equally serious threat to the planters' control over the slaves. It was indicative of the Crown's hesitant approach to such dramatic reform that neither the ban on separating married slaves nor the role of the teachers was mentioned in the abolition edict, but only in the resolution, which was a formal statement of the Crown's opinion but did not have the legal force of an edict.

Oxholm, in discussing the low birth rate among the slaves, mentioned venereal disease as a serious problem among slave women. He added that many slave women, using knowledge that was common on the Guinea coast, induced abortions by using certain roots and herbs. They did this, according to Oxholm, "only in order to indulge their unrestrained passions, without being hindered by children [alleene for at følge deres løsagtige Passioner, uden Forhindringer ved Børn]." Another factor responsible for retarding the growth of the slave population was the ignorance of the midwives, which resulted in the death of many children in the first nine days after birth. "To overcome all of these difficulties will involve the challenge of transforming the entire Negro race and its nature; even if this were possible, it would take a very long time [at overvinde alle disse Vanskeligheder vil udfordre at omdanne heele Neger Arten og deres Natur; er dette end giørligt, vil det dog tage en megen lang

Tiid]."[69] Oxholm doubted that it would be possible to increase the slaves' birth rate to the point where it would at least offset their death rate, though he was convinced that the gap could be closed.[70]

Walterstorff believed that secure slave marriages offered the greatest promise of increasing the birth rate. But he believed, as Oxholm did, that creating stable marriages among the slaves would require time and "a change in the slaves' way of thinking":

> The climate and irritability of the nerves, the violence of the slaves' propensities and mental disorders [Tilbøielighedernes og Sindslidelsernes Heftighed hos Negerslaegten], along with opportunity and habit have brought about and will for a long time maintain unrestrained passions and a type of polygamy. It is not unusual to find a male slave, especially among the drivers, sugar boilers, or artisans, who has three or four or perhaps as many as seven wives, usually on different plantations.[71]

Oxholm cautioned that the excess of deaths over births among the slaves was not the fault of the planters: "The cause [for the failure] should be sought in local contingencies, both physical and moral, and not in the planters' reluctance or opposition."[72]

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[69]Vice Stadshauptmand Oxholms Anmaerkninger, August 1, 1792, pp. 11-12. See Michael Craton, "Jamaican Slavery," and Richard B. Sheridan, "Mortality and Medical Treatment of Slaves in the British West Indies," in Race and Slavery in the Western Hemisphere, ed. by Stanley L. Engerman and Eugene D. Genovese (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1975), pp. 267-69 and pp. 285-90 for a discussion of promiscuity and the slaves' birth rate.

[70]Vice Stadshauptmand Oxholms Anmaerkninger, August 1, 1792, p. 17.

[71]Report by Walterstorff, September 21, 1792, p. 7. Such relatively unbiased sources as Oldendorp, writing more than twenty-five years earlier, and A. B. Bentzon, in 1802, confirm that polygamy was common among the slaves on St. Croix.

[72]Vice Stadshauptmand Oxholms Anmaerkninger, August 1, 1792, p. 24.

Regarding slave marriages, the West Indian government said it would be "useless to introduce legal marital relations."

> Either most marriages will have to be annuled or the masters' property rights will have to be limited, and this we dare not recommend [og hertil tør vi ikke raade]. Each planter will always find it in his own best interest to promote regular marital relations among his slaves, because such a policy will inhibit the widespread wandering around at night [which the slaves engage in] to visit their husbands or wives [on other plantations].[73]

No mention was made of the royal resolution's stipulation that children under six not be separated from their mothers, but it would obviously be just as unenforceable, in the view of the colonial government, as the prohibition on separating married slaves.

Johan Gottlieb Miecke, supervisor of the Moravian missionaries in the Danish West Indies, having been asked for his thoughts on legal slave marriages, listed several factors which he thought would make the success of such unions unlikely. He said the greatest freedom the slaves had was that of engaging in relations without interference from their masters. They "knew no boundaries of human order" concerning fornication and frequently ruined their health unless "though the grace of God a complete change was brought about in their hearts [durch Gottes Gnade eine gänzliche Veränderung des Herzens in ihnen bewürkt wird]."[74] Even in cases where such a

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[73]DSA, VGRGT, Vestindisk Journal, No. 139, 1793, Pro Memoria from government of Danish West Indies to General Customs Department, December 31, 1792, p. 6.

[74]DSA, VGRGT, Dokumenter vedkommende Kommissionen til Negerhandelens bedre Indretning og Ophaevelse, Unterthänigst Pro Memoria from Johan Gottlieb Miecke to government of Danish West Indies, November 15, 1792, p. 5.

change of heart occurred, married slaves were still subject to being separated when the planters wanted to buy or sell a slave, give one to a friend or relative as a present, or to a creditor to pay a debt; there were cases where a planter sent a slave to one of his plantations on another island, keeping the mate behind because it served his purposes to do so. Under such circumstances it was difficult for the slaves to form stable marriages. One thing which Miecke thought could be done to encourage slave marriages was to make it illegal for a slave simply to exchange his wife for another "according to his pleasure [nach seinem Belieben]." The state should do something to establish order among the slaves' sexual unions, perhaps by having slaves restrict their selection of a mate to another slave on the same plantation, with house slaves in the cities, whenever possible, also marrying a slave owned by the same master.[75]

The royal resolution of February 24, 1792, had also called for the creation of a group of teachers, drawn from the ranks of the Moravian Brethren, who would go onto the plantations to instruct the slaves and hear their complaints. This proposal could be opposed in the West Indies by arguing that the cost of carrying it out was too high and/or that the planters' property rights and authority over their slaves should not be tampered with. The royal council on St. Thomas used the former approach. After stating that the plan to put slaves into various Christian congregations, each headed by a Moravian, "is so benevolent and praiseworthy [velgiørende

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[75]Ibid., p. 7.

og priselig] that one must strongly wish to see it carried out," the council added: "There is reason to believe the arrangement will involve greater costs for His Majesty's treasury than one perhaps thought when drawing up the plan."[76] The council agreed that the Moravian Brethren were best suited to serve as teachers, but noted that more of the brethren would have to be sent from Europe, for those presently in the Danish islands were not sufficient to carry out the task. Added to the cost of transportation would be that of maintaining the new teachers--providing them with homes, land to farm, and a salary of at least 300 rigsdaler a year. If the Crown decided to proceed with the plan, six teachers would be needed for St. Thomas and four for St. John. The council suggested that the expense of providing land and houses for the teachers could be avoided if the latter lived in the present Moravian missions and, using them as bases, traveled around the islands teaching religion to the slaves. The planters and overseers would have to allow the teachers to do their work without interference and encourage the slaves to attend church.[77]

The Moravian leader on St. Croix, Johan Gottlieb Miecke, also criticized the costs of the Crown's proposal. He favored building only two additional missions on St. Croix, one in the center

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[76]Report of Raadet paa St. Thomas to government of Danish West Indies, November 19, 1792, p. 1.

[77]Ibid., pp. 2-4. Malleville, commandant of St. Thomas and the author of this report, was a Moravian convert.

of the island and the other at the eastern end, to improve the Moravians' access to the slave population. Rather than embracing what could have been an excellent opportunity to spread the religious message of his fellows to the very persons he and the other Moravians had come so far to serve, Miecke adopted a cautious approach, apparently seeking to avoid anything beyond a minimum of effort by the Moravians.[78]

The colonial government emphasized the need to keep the teachers from in any way coming between the masters and the slaves. Having agreed that the Moravian Brethren were best suited to instruct the slaves, the government added:

> That these [Moravian teachers] should go around on the plantations in order to conduct lessons will in several respects not be feasible [ej vaere gjørligt]. The plantation owners will regard it as interference with their property rights, if someone without their permission were allowed to live among their slaves and exercise any kind of authority over the same. Perhaps the slaves would become accustomed to regarding the teachers in certain ways as a new source of authority or at least as persons who would be inclined to take their side against their masters. Among the teachers themselves there might also be one or another scheming [intrigant] person. All of these things could cause an action [Gierning], the results of which are easier to anticipate [forudse] than to suppress. We must therefore in a very positive manner declare ourselves against all instruction in religion for the slaves which does not take place in public and at appointed times.[79]

The colonial government agreed with Miecke's proposal that two new Moravian churches be constructed on St. Croix so that the slaves will not have so far to go to "their devotional meetings

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[78]Unterthänigst Pro Memoria, November 15, 1792, pp. 8-10.

[79]Pro Memoria from government of Danish West Indies to General Customs Department, December 31, 1792, p. 4.

[deres gudelige Forsamlinger]." Though the ideal would be to establish special mission stations in each section [Qvarteer] of the islands, which would involve seven new churches on St. Croix, six on St. Thomas, and four on St. John, the costs of such an undertaking would be so great that it was best to start by following Miecke's suggestion. Money for the two new churches and the Moravians to be stationed there could be obtained by using the funds set aside for use by the Danish Lutheran mission, for the Danish clergy did no work outside the towns or among the plantation slaves. The best hours for instruction in religion for adult slaves were weekday evenings and Sundays. The government added that it assumed that slaves would not be forced to join Christian congregations if they preferred their "fatherland's religion," for such force exerted over their religious life would be "harsher than the force under which their physical labor is now expended."[80]

The colonial government, in particular Governor Walterstorff and Stadshauptmand Oxholm, in cooperation with the planters in the burger councils, had managed to divert the Crown's call for humanitarian reforms to ameliorate the condition of the slaves whenever such reform seemed to affect the vital interests of the planters. Furthermore, regarding religious instruction of the slaves, the Moravian Brethren had shown no enthusiasm for a significant expansion of their efforts. The only "reform" which was enthusiastically supported in the West Indies was the loan for buying slaves.

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[80]Ibid., pp. 4-7.

The General Customs Department did not press the colonial government towards implementing and enforcing reforms to help the slaves. Antagonizing the planters would endanger the continued loyalty of the islands to Denmark: the Crown could not hope to compel the planters to remain subject to Denmark if the planters, the great majority of whom were English-speaking, decided to switch their allegiance to another, more lenient European state. The highly volatile siutation in the West Indies in the early 1790s surely suggested to the Danish Crown that it was wise not to push the planters too far. But in fact the planters were pushed hardly at all.

The years passed and nothing was done to help the slaves; yet the General Customs Department in 1796 praised the planters for improving the treatment of their slaves, though there was no evidence that any improvement had occurred. The department evidently believed the self-interest of the planters had automatically led to better slave treatment; noting that four years had passed since publication of the abolition edict, the department wrote to the West Indian government: "It can in the meantime not be otherwise than that the way of thinking in the islands in regard to the slave matter has changed considerably, that the change has been of advantage to the slaves' living conditions, and that steps are being taken not only towards improving their physical upbringing but also toward improving their education, their marriages, etc.; similarly, their numbers must have been increased and the ratio between male and female

slaves have been improved by the purchase of new slaves."[81] The department added that it was still waiting for data collected by the West Indian government since the latter's report of December 31, 1792, in order to use the data as a basis for arrangements and legislation which would support "the education of the slaves, their morality, marriages, and the reduction of the distance between the slaves and their masters [Formindskelsen af Afstanden imellem dem og deres Herrer] . . . without offending notions of ownership rights [uden at støde an mod Bergreberne om Ejendomsretten]."[82] The statement regarding a "reduction of the distance between the slaves and their masters" is somewhat surprising, as nothing was said about tampering with this "distance" in the royal resolution of February 24, 1792, or in the abolition edict. The department requested a full report on the slave population, including a breakdown by sex, age, and marital status. The letter concluded with a request for suggestions which might "promote the refinement of the slaves [befordre Negrenes Foraedling]; this refinement, to which the planters' own benefit is very closely connected, will in all probability effectively enable most of the slaves to withstand the ferment among their brethren which is being spread by the current upheavals [Omvaeltninger]."[83]

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[81] DSA, VGRGT, Vestindisk Kopibog, 1796, No. 234. Letter from General Customs Department to government of Danish West Indies, August 20, 1796, p. 1.

[82] Ibid., pp. 1-2.

[83] Ibid., p. 2.

As expected by the Crown, the loans to the planters to buy slaves along with the opening of the slave trade to the Danish islands to ships of all countries led to a dramatic increase in the slave population, reversing the trend of the previous decade. From 1792 through 1796, the number of slaves on St. Croix grew from 22,144 to 24,352.[84] This increase was accounted for by new slaves from Africa (Kyst-Negere) rather than by an excess of births over deaths; the slaves' death rate remained much higher than their birth rate, with a total of 907 more deaths than births during this period:

	Slave Births	Slave Deaths
1793	460	606
1794	469	633
1795	463	760
1796	458	748
	1,840	2,747[85]

The increase in deaths was a typical consequence of having more African slaves in the islands, for new slaves generally suffered a high death rate during their year of seasoning. The stable number of births was another indication that the planters were not yet reacting to the threat of abolition by improving the treatment of their slaves, something the Committee of the Slave Trade had assumed they would be compelled to do by their own self-interest. The

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[84]DSA, VGRGT, Om Negerhandelens Afskaffelse, population data from tax rolls (Matrikler) for 1793, 1794, 1795, and 1796.

[85]Peter Lotharius Oxholm, De danske Vestindiske Øers Tilstand i Henseende til Population, Cultur, og Finance-Forfatning (Copenhagen, 1797), p. 62.

traditional attitude of quick profits at the expense of long-range prosperity and stability apparently still dominated the thinking of the planters.

On St. Thomas and St. John, the number of slaves increased from 6,162 in 1793 to 6,693 in 1796. On these islands, in sharp contrast to St. Croix, slave births apparently exceeded slave deaths:

	Slave Births	Slave Deaths
1793	128	38
1794	82	49
1795	89	50
1796	93	54
	392	191[86]

The surplus of births over deaths reflects the fact that the slaves on St. Thomas and St. John, islands settled long before St. Croix, were better acclimated and contained in their ranks fewer new slaves from Africa. Yet new slaves mainly accounted for the increases.

According to Oxholm, the loans to the planters for buying slaves had encouraged English slavers to compete with one another in selling their slaves in the Danish West Indies, and "the larger number of slaves available for purchase had driven the price [of the slaves] down to a level much lower than in the surrounding islands." Malleville's fears that Danish planters, trying to buy

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[86]DSA, VGRGT, Om Negerhandelens Afskaffelse, population data from tax rolls of St. Thomas and St. John for 1793, 1794, 1795, and 1796. The data on slave deaths are probably inaccurate, however, as the 54 deaths reported for St. Thomas and St. John in 1796 represent a crude death rate of 8.07 per thousand, an unrealistically low figure.

as many slaves as possible prior to abolition, would bid up the price of slaves now appeared unfounded. The English slavers were attracted by the security provided by the bills of exchange backed by the Danish Crown and also preferred the Danish bills because they could be redeemed in Europe after only three months, instead of twelve or more months, as was common with the bills of exchange issued by private citizens in the British islands. Oxholm wrote that the desirability of the bills of exchange provided in the Danish islands also allowed planters there to select the healthiest and strongest slaves; the unhealthy, weak ones were then purchased by local merchants who took them to the "western colonies," where the slaves were exchanged for various articles of trade, to the benefit of the Danish islands.[87]

In the English islands, merchants normally paid from forty-five to forty-eight pounds sterling for an entire shipload of slaves, but on St. Croix a similar cargo sold for forty to forty-two pounds sterling. Yet this lower price attracted slavers to St. Croix, because half of the sum paid for slaves consisted of the bills of exchange given as a loan to the planters by the loan committee. (The rest of the money used to buy slaves was provided by bills of exchange backed by private merchants and redeemable after six, nine, or twelve months.) The average price of a healthy African slave, male or

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[87]Oxholm, De danske Vestindiske Øers Tilstand, pp. 28-29. Thus local merchants openly sold slaves to other islands in violation of the ban on exporting slaves from the Danish islands contained in the abolition edict.

female, was 400 rigsdaler vestindisk courant, while in the English islands a similar slave sold for 450 to 500 rigsdaler vestindisk courant.[88]

The sums made available for loans had been used up each year. As of November 1, 1796, the loan fund had been used in the Danish West Indies to buy 2,567 slaves, and planters on the three islands had purchased 1,932 on their own, making the total number of slaves imported and kept 4,499. Approximately 854 slaves had been landed on St. Croix but, remaining unsold, later had been taken to other colonies. Others had obviously been re-exported from St. Thomas, for this would account for the failure of the slave population to increase as much as it should have if all 4,499 slaves imported and sold in the islands had actually been retained. On November 2, 1796, there were 500 African slaves still unsold in the Danish islands.[89] This was perhaps an indication that the islands had already absorbed about as many slaves as there was a demand for. Additional evidence in this regard is that in the four years from 1793 through 1796, 687,800 rigsdaler vestindisk courant had been made available to the planters for buying slaves, but as of November 1796, 116,890 rigsdaler had not been used. Though the land planted in sugar on St. Croix had increased from 26,604 acres in 1792 to 27,655 acres in 1796, there wasn't much more available that was suitable for sugar cultivation, as the eastern end of the island was

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[88]Ibid., p. 29.

[89]Ibid., pp. 32-33.

too dry and mountains covered much of the northern part of St. Croix.[90]

The loan to the planters had encouraged an increase in the slave population and in sugar production; but the reforms to ameliorate the treatment of the slaves had been stymied by the colonial government. The General Customs Department had not made more than a perfunctory attempt at encouraging the colonial government to support amelioration and had accepted the latter's view that the property rights of the planters over their slaves were not to be interfered with by the state. It was not clear whether the Crown would actually abolish the slave trade on January 1, 1803, in accordance with the abolition edict, if faced with strong resistance from the West Indies when the grace period expired.

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[90]Ibid., pp. 34-35, p. 38.

CHAPTER VI

The Abolition Edict Preserved

The Danish abolition edict was promulgated at a time when the spirit of reform was dominant in Copenhagen under the influence of Counts Bernstroff, Reventlow, and Schimmelmann. Yet the reform era had ended by 1800. The power of the reform-minded ministers of state had weakened by then, and the stronger role of Crown Prince Frederik in policy-making exerted a conservative influence. Bernstorff died in June 1797, and none of the remaining ministers of state possessed the authority to replace him. As a result, Crown Prince Frederik, then 29, increasingly took control of the government, in keeping with his desire to rule on his own.[1]

The Crown Prince's authority continued, as it had since 1784, to depend on his position as chairman of the Council of State, and on the provision that no royal command was valid unless signed by him. He also relied on the generally accepted view that as heir to the throne and as actual regent he should rightly exercise authority over the monarchy. By 1805 Frederik had undermined the authority of the Council of State to the point where it was only a

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[1]Vibaek, Reform og Fallit, 255ff.

shadow of its former self; his lengthy stays in the duchies in 1803-04, motivated by fears for the southern border area, and his more or less permanent residence there in 1805 meant he could not consult as closely with the Council of State as before, and he refused to allow the council to exercise authority on his behalf.[2] But by his absence, bureaucrats in Copenhagen, knowing that the Crown Prince was far away and preoccupied with foreign policy and military matters, gained authority to act, or fail or act, as they pleased.

The abolition edict had been predicated on the assumption that the slave population of the Danish West Indies could be maintained without further slave imports after January 1, 1803. Two leading West Indian figures, Walterstorff and Oxholm, returned to Copenhagen in the 1790s and argued for postponing abolition; Walterstorff became a confidant of Crown Prince Frederik, so that he was well placed to influence the thinking of Denmark's head of state. As it turned out, a victory for the foes of abolition was only narrowly averted.

The question of whether Denmark would actually enforce the abolition edict was first openly raised following a series of attacks on the Danish West Indian government published in Politisk og physisk Magazin in the spring of 1797. The anonymous author of

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[2] Linvald, Kronprins Frederik og hans Regering, 1797-1807, pp. 3-9. Christian VII continued to attend meetings of the Council of State and signed documents placed before him, though both mentally and physically his deterioration grew steadily worse.

"Letters from St. Croix" first described, tongue in cheek, how customs officials, in order to support their families, accepted bribes to allow smuggling, thereby contributing to the general welfare of the colonies. His language grew stronger as he referred to the planters as a corrupted and ungrateful class who avoided paying their debts to the Crown and sought to accumulate wealth so they could leave the islands as soon as possible. They realized the small, mountainous Lesser Antilles were doomed to declining productivity and eventual ruin in the face of competition from sugar producers on larger islands in the Greater Antilles, especially in Cuba ("the Spaniards are not as backward as many believe") and in mainland areas such as Surinam.[3] The April edition of Politisk og physisk Magazin contained a second "Letter from St. Croix" criticizing the St. Croix planters' "pride and arrogance, which is usually a result of wealth," and their pro-English sympathies, which caused them to avoid learning the Danish language even though "they are born in a Danish colony." The author argued that their purchase of smuggled merchandise from the English islands, especially from nearby Tortola, meant that Danish consumer products could not be sold in the Danish West Indies.[4]

In response to this criticism of the West Indian regime and the planter class Oxholm wrote his book, De danske vestindiske Øers Tilstand, defending the colonial authorities and arguing that abolition

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[3]"Breve fra St. Croix; første Brev, St. Croix den 16 Januari 1796" Politisk og physisk Magazin, Copenhagen, March 1797, pp. 257-274.

[4]Ibid., April 1797, pp. 395-401.

of the slave trade ought to be delayed beyond 1803. He wrote that pregnant slaves worked in the fields and carried heavy objects on their heads; the result was a large number of accidental abortions. He concluded that the birth rate would continue to lag behind the death rate, necessitating "a longer period than ten years to attain the goal of abolition."[5] He believed the vitality of slavery as a system of production depended on a continuation of the slave trade; and slavery was a necessary evil. "Although it cannot be denied that slavery in itself is contrary to the basic principles of humanity, it would perhaps be impossible to end slavery, because of its long existence, without devastating consequences for the cultivation of the colonies." The best approach, he argued, was to ameliorate the slaves' condition and to regard slavery as a "moral evil which must be tolerated because it cannot be abolished or corrected without bringing about consequences which would be much worse and more damaging for the state and its subjects." Oxholm concluded: "The colonial system is a stain on the constitution [Statsforfatning] of Europe which must out of necessity be permitted,

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[5]Oxholm, De danske vestindiske Øers Tilstand, pp. 57-58. Oxholm, unlike Walterstorff, preferred to blame abortions on the carelessness of the slaves rather than on their supposedly lascivious inclinations; the important thing for both men, of course, was to indicate that the planters were not at fault and that increasing the birth rate was not within their power. In the introduction to his book Oxholm wrote that he had sold all his property on St. Croix, so his opinion could be regarded as impartial (Da jeg har solgt alle mine Eiendomme i hiint Land, . . . saa kan min Stemme mindre mistaenkes for Partiskhed). Yet the St. Croix slave census taken in 1804-05 by Governor Mühlenfels listed Oxholm as owner of two plantations, Ruby and Diamond, with 235 slaves.

because its rash removal would have the most pernicious influence on the prosperity of entire nations and destroy many millions of persons who earn their livings in those industries and branches of commerce which are supported and maintained by the colonial trade."[6]

Oxholm's defense of slavery and his comments on the need to continue the slave trade beyond the deadline set for abolition led the pro-reform journal Laerde Efterretninger to express its fear that the abolition edict would never be implemented. In a review of Oxholm's book, the journal was critical of the continued excess of deaths over births among slaves in the islands during 1793-96. Laerde Efterretninger noted that the plan for abolition of the slave trade, once considered as the first step of a process leading to freedom for the slaves in the Danish islands, "seems (if only this reviewer is mistaken!) merely to have supplied our islands with more slaves and our poets, orators, and flatterers with a perfect opportunity for sonorous phrases [blot at have skaffet vore Øer flere Slaver og vore Digtere, Talere, Smigrere en skiøn Anledning til klingende Udtryk]." The reviewer then referred to P. A. Heiberg's poem, "Fred med Kongerne paa Jorden," stating that the poet's praise of Crown Prince Frederik for breaking the chains of the Negroes "would perhaps be a . . . mystery for posterity."[7]

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[6]Ibid., p. 10.

[7]Laerde Efterretninger, No. 10, 1798, p. 154.

The reviewer in Skandinavisk Museum agreed with Oxholm that "so long as the planters fail to discourage irregular sexual liaisons [avvaerge uordentlige Sammenleje] and to encourage legal marriages, to reduce the amount of work performed by pregnant women, to subsidize those slave families which have several children and by other means seek this benevolent goal [of increasing the number of births], all the government's efforts will be futile." But a time would come when the planters would finally realize that their own advantage provided a compelling reason for "granting the slaves fairer treatment and, eventually, full freedom [at tilstaae Negrene större Billigheder og omsider deres fulde Frihed], and for seriously working to improve the culture and morality of these unhappy persons, because the planters would have to abandon sugar cultivation if they continued their present approach."[8]

Despite pressures exerted in favor of continuing the slave trade, Schimmelmann was not likely to retreat from the position taken by the Committee on the Slave Trade in its report advocating abolition. For one thing, his sister, Countess Julie Reventlow, continued after promulgation of the abolition edict to urge her brother to pursue policies that would benefit the slaves and to prevent subversion of his good intentions by others who cared little for the welfare of the slaves. Thus in 1793 she wrote him:

> I have had neither rest nor peace [weder Rast noch Ruhe] during the past fourteen days . . . . But I must move a heavy

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[8]Skandinavisk Museum, I (1798), 400.

> burden from my soul. My dear, beloved Ernst! I can no longer keep silent about the most important matter of my life. Oh, I beseech you, let your noble zeal for our slaves, for our previously resolved upon plans, now blaze as much as ever. I fear that others, now when it comes to a decision, though they may not be cold [towards helping the slaves], will yet behave in a very half-hearted manner.
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> I cannot possibly let myself be turned back with the wretched statement that our slaves are well-off, well-fed, and well-clothed; and I become enraged in my soul when I have to listen to such statements. Without sacrifice from our side, of course, nothing can be attained . . . . Let us nevertheless at least make some kind of a beginning. As yet no schools have been constructed! As yet no Moravians have been hired to instruct the young slaves in the Christian religion, which for me is by far the most important thing. Likewise, still more abuses will be permitted and put up with, which will have very dismal moral consequences [traurige sittliche Folgen]. Of course I understand fully that one in these terrible times of madness and insurrection [in diesen schreklichen Zeiten des Wahnsinns und Aufruhrs] can and may only take action with a gentle hand. I commit all of this to your wisdom and your inexhaustible love of mankind [unerschöpflischen Menschenliebe], which is always a truthful adviser. You would render me an inexpressible service of friendship [unaussprechliche Liebesdienst] if you were to keep me informed of the results of your deliberations concerning the slaves [Eurer Berathschlagungen über die Neger].[9]

Julie Reventlow wrote to the Moravian headquarters in Herrnhut, Saxony, and got her brother Ernst to do the same, complaining of the reluctance of Moravian missionaries in the Danish islands to baptize all the slave children on the Moravians' own plantations. Schimmelmann himself urged the Moravians to give any surplus earnings on their plantations to the slaves.[10] Julie Reventlow surely exaggerated the

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[9]Bobé, Efterladte papirer fra den Reventlowske Familiekreds, VIII, 342-44. Letter from Countess Julie Reventlow, from Emkendorf in Holstein, to Ernst Schimmelmann, November 28, 1793.

[10]Lawaetz, Brødremenighedens Mission: Dansk Vestindien, 1769-1849, pp. 212-13. The letters in the Moravian archives were destroyed during World War II.

Moravians' commitment to improving the treatment of the slaves. A leading Moravian convert, Governor Malleville, wrote the General Customs Department of the need to keep the slaves at a proper distance from the whites. He accordingly advised against a proposal from Copenhagen to allow slaves to participate, along with whites, in trials involving other slaves. Malleville added that slaves were better treated since promulgation of the abolition edict because of the planters' realization that their own interests lay in promoting the survival of their slaves rather than in destroying them by overwork and mistreatment.[11]

Schimmelmann had placed his reputation behind the proposal for abolition and had the support of pro-reform government officials. Ultimately, though, Schimmelmann's authority and the wishes of other abolitionists could be negated by Crown Prince Frederik, who was eager to rule on his own and did so increasingly after Bernstorff's death in 1797; but Frederik was also mindful of public opinion as expressed in the Copenhagen press and, not suprisingly, relished its praise.[12] Most importantly, he had to rely on his bureaucracy

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[11]DSA, VGRGT, Vestindisk Journal, No. 458, 1798, Letter from Governor Malleville to General Customs Department, March 17, 1798, pp. 1-3. This was the view which the planter class wished to have accepted in Copenhagen, and it is contradicted by data on birth and death rates and by testimony from an unbiased source reporting to Schimmelmann on the condition of the slaves in 1802. See below, A. B. Bentzon's report, pp. 220ff.

[12]Frederik's growing concern about press criticism of the church, the nobility, and absolutism itself led to a law of September 27, 1799, which required writers to submit their material to the police for examination prior to publication and required special permission for operating a printing press. The poet P. A. Heiberg was deported a few months later. See Vibaek, Reform og Fallit, 193-203.

for data and policy recommendations, and his intentions could be subverted by opposition from the bureaucracy, which is precisely what was to happen regarding abolition of the slave trade.

Sugar production in the Danish islands benefited in the 1790s both from additional workers and from rising sugar prices resulting from the upheaval on St. Domingue. Customs duties collected in Copenhagen from the West Indian trade increased from 13,242 rigsdaler in 1792 to 176,011 rigsdaler in 1799.[13] Despite the increase in the labor force, however, sugar production on St. Croix actually declined from 1793 to 1796, because of poor weather, averaging 18.7 million pounds a year. But by 1800 sugar production reached 32.5 million pounds.[14]

The Schimmelmann plantations prospered during the 1790s, earning profits of 171,132 rigsdaler in 1793, 85,442 rigsdaler in 1795, and 108,190 rigsdaler in 1797.[15] The price of brown sugar sold on St. Croix rose from 11.5 Skilling per pound in 1792 to 18 Skilling in 1797.[16]

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[13]Sveistrup and Willerslev, Den danske Sukkerhandels og Sukkerproduktions Historie, pp. 60-61. This included duties on goods from non-Danish islands as well, and duties were raised slightly in 1797.

[14]Oxholm, De danske Vestindiske Øers Tilstand, p. 39, and Sveistrup, De dansk-vestindiske Øers økonomiske Historie, p. 70.

[15]DSA, Grev Ernst Schimmelmanns Privatarkiv, Pk. 72, Fideikommisset vedkommende Papirer, 1782-1800. See Vortrag zur Generalversammlung for, respectively, 1794, p. 4; 1796, p. 3; and 1798, p. 3.

[16]Sveistrup and Willerslev, Den danske Sukkerhandels og Sukkerproduktions Historie, p. 63. There were 96 Skilling per rigsdaler. See Knud Erik Svendsen et al., Dansk Pengehistorie (Odense: Danmarks Nationalbank, 1968), I, 13.

The slave population on the Schimmelmann plantation grew as a result of the purchase of new slaves, not because of an excess of births over deaths, for the death rate continued to exceed the birth rate even on those supposedly model plantations. The population of the four Schimmelmann plantations increased from 886 in 1792 to 982 in 1799. In 1792, adult female slaves exceeded males by 309 to 258, a preponderance which declined slightly by 1799, when there were 345 adult females and 319 adult males, indicating the purchase of more male than female slaves. This practice was contrary to the recommendations of the Committee on the Slave Trade. Data from the period September 1795 to September 1796 show that twenty slaves were born and twenty-nine died. In that year, four female mulattoes bought their freedom. But thirty-four new slaves were purchased at a cost of 10,080 rigsdaler dansk courant, an average price of 296 rigsdaler. It is not unreasonable to assume that Schimmelmann was using government loans for at least part of these purchases, though there is no proof that he was. From September 1798 to September 1799, twenty-one slaves were born on the Schimmelmann plantations and thirty-two died. One mulatto woman bought her freedom, and an old mulatto male was freed. This loss of thirteen slaves was more than compensated for by the purchase of twenty-eight new slaves.[17] Thus the Schimmelmann plantations continued to suffer an excess of deaths over births, with only the purchase of new slaves maintaining and,

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[17]DSA, Grev Ernst Schimmelmanns Privatarkiv, Pk. 72. See Vortrag zur Generalversammlung, 1792-1800.

in these years, increasing the population on them. If the population of the slaves on the Schimmelmann plantations could not be maintained, there was probably little likelihood that smaller and poorer plantations could achieve a balance of births and deaths.

The government loans to planters for buying slaves apparently ceased in 1799. The Crown had concluded that the loans had been misused by at least three members of the loan committee in the islands, including Oxholm. An anonymous pamphlet published in Copenhagen had accused Oxholm of using the loans to buy large numbers of slaves and then reselling the slaves individually for a profit.[18] Oxholm admitted that he had done so but defended his actions by arguing that he had merely helped planters acquire the slaves they needed, a practice which he felt justified and in keeping with the intention of the loan plan.[19]

Probably prompted by the publicity about misuse of the loans and about Oxholm's admission of having profited from buying and selling slaves, the Committee on the Slave Trade wrote the General Customs Department on May 9, 1799, that "no member of the committee established in the Danish islands to administer loans to the planters may, either directly or indirectly, participate or take part in the sale of slaves." The committee requested that the department send

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[18]"Berigtigelser ved Hr. Major Oxholms Skrift over de danske vestindiske Øers Tilstand," anonymous pamphlet, Copenhagen, 1798, p. 18.

[19]Oxholm, "Urigtigheder i de saakaldte Berigtigelser," Copenhagen, 1798, pp. 19ff.

an order to that effect to the government of the Danish West Indies. Members of the loan committee, who were all government officials, were not accused of wrong-doing, as the Committee on the Slave Trade said it "had no official report on the matter," but believed the ban on slave trading for members of the loan committee was justified because "there seems to be reason enough for such an order from the very nature of the matter," in effect admitting that the temptation was too great and should therefore be eliminated.[20]

The Commission for the Liquidation of the West Indian Debt expressed concern in a letter to the Committee on the Slave Trade about the repayment of loans made to planters and the failure of the West Indian loan committee to send to Copenhagen data on how many of the slaves purchased by means of the loan were still alive; as the slaves were the security used to obtain the loans, there was ample reason for concern. The commission therefore urged acceptance of the plantations themselves as security, even if they were already mortgaged more than once. Furthermore, the loan committee had, in violation of the stipulations put forth in the final draft of the loan plan, loaned an average of 239 rigsdaler vestindisk courant to planters for the slaves they bought using the loan, though the highest sum to be granted for buying an adult male slave was 225 rigsdaler. The loan plan did allow up to 250 rigsdaler for a female

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[20]DSA, VGRGT, Kommissionen til Negerhandelens bedre Indretning og Ophaevelse, Pro Memoria from Committee on the Slave Trade to General Customs Department, May 9, 1799, p. 1.

slave aged fourteen to twenty-five, but it seemed proable to the commission that only a few women in this age group had been imported, as slaves in this category were seldom available for sale in Africa. As of March 1, 1799, 5,302 slaves had been bought in the islands with funds supplied by the Crown, with 1,267,000 rigsdaler vestindisk courant of the 1,302,644 rigsdaler vestindisk courant set aside for loans having already been allocated three years before the loans were to end.[21]

The slave population of the Danish West Indies had continued to grow in the 1790s: in January 1792, the three islands contained 27,604 slaves; by 1797, the slave population reached 32,851 an increase of 5,147 since publication of the abolition edict. The slaves on St. Croix had increased from 21,546 to 25,884; on St. Thomas from 4,214 to 4,837; and on St. John from 1,844 to 2,127.[22] In 1802, St. Croix had 27,006 slaves, St. Thomas 5,813, and St. John 2,530. The slave population of the Danish colonies had reached 35,349; there were also 3,014 whites and 2,102 free colored. Though slave deaths in 1801 were 744 and births only 500, in 1802 594 slaves died while 676 were born, suggesting the possibility of a self-sustaining slave

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[21]DSA, VGRGT, Dokumenter vedkommende Kommissionen til Negerhandelens bedre Indretning og Ophaevelse, undated letter from Directionen for den vestindiske Gaelds Likvidation to Committee on the slave trade, pp. 1-7. The colonial government on September 2, 1802, wrote the General Customs Department that an epidemic, a crop failure and British occupation of the islands had kept planters from using the remainder of the loan fund. See p. 228 below.

[22]DSA, VGRGT, Om Negerhandelens Afskaffelse, Tax Rolls for 1792 and 1797. These figures are probably too low, of course, as they were supplied by the planters.

population.[23] It was during the first five years of the ten-year grace period prior to abolition that the number of slaves on St. Croix increased dramatically. The slow-down in the growth of the slave population after 1797 indicates that the island's need for additional slaves was diminishing.

A basic assumption of Schimmelmann and the Committee on the Slave Trade had been that their plan for "gradual" abolition would give the planters time to prepare for the day when they could no longer replace their dead slaves by purchasing new ones from Africa. It was assumed that the planters would, in their own self-interest, improve treatment of the slaves they presently owned. The committee had not taken into account the tendency of many planters to seek quick profits and abandon the islands for Europe as soon as possible. Civic pride was minimal in the Danish West Indies, as it was generally in the Caribbean sugar islands. So long as the planters could buy slaves, were indeed encouraged to do so with the help of loans provided by the Crown, they had little incentive to seek improvement in the birth rate or in the survival rate of their slaves, for slave children were a useless burden in the short run, and maintaining elderly or crippled slaves, who were referred to as udyktige (inefficient or incapable), was similarly onerous. The continued excess of deaths over births on St. Croix was evidence that

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[23]DSA, VGRGT, Om Negerhandelens Afskaffelse, population lists taken from the tax rolls and sent from St. Croix by Governor Balthazar Frederik Mühlenfels, St. Croix, September 28, 1803.

amelioration had not yet been widely adopted by local planters.

Population data contained in the tax rolls bear out the contention that deaths continued to exceed births by an amount sufficient to insure the decline of the slave population once the abolition edict took effect, with predictable long-range consequences for sugar production. The crude birth rate and crude death rate of the slaves on St. Croix from 1792 through 1799 and for 1801-1802 are as follows:

	Slave Births per Thousand	Slave Deaths per Thousand
1792	18.52	20.94
1793	20.77	27.37
1794	20.17	27.23
1795	19.00	31.19
1796	18.81	30.72
1797	19.94	37.85
1798	19.89	26.75
1799	19.51	29.39
1801	18.90	28.12
1802	25.03	21.99[24]
Average (arithmetical mean)	20.05	Average (arithmetical mean) 28.15

An additional source concerning the plight of the slaves ten years after promulgation of the abolition edict is a forty-page report

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[24]DSA, VGRGT, Om Negerhandelens Afskaffelse, Tax Rolls for St. Croix, 1792-1799, 1801-1802.

sent to Schimmelmann on July 24, 1802, by Regeringsraad A. B. Bentzon, who had arrived in the West Indies in 1799. The report, "Concerning the Slaves on the Danish West Indian Islands (Om Negerne paa de danske Øer i Vestindien)," gives a detailed discussion of current problems and demonstrates how little improvement, if any, there had been in the treatment of slaves since 1792. Bentzon, who later became governor-general of the Danish West Indies, was not a planter, and his account is free from the obvious pro-planter biases that affected the reports of Oxholm and Walterstorff. He warned Schimmelmann of the grave danger of slave revolt, for the recently arrived African slaves in particular showed growing signs of unrest (I de trende sidste Maaneder har man bemaerket hos Kystnegerne en Tilbøielighed til Insubordination) which on one St. Croix plantation had resulted in the murder of a white overseer. He argued that only the loyalty of many creole slaves to their masters had prevented a general slave rising, "the worst of all calamities, a revolt of the Helots [den vaerste af alle Calamiteter, en Helotkrig]." Yet he admitted that creole slaves might secretly harbor rebellious instincts.[25]

Bentzon placed part of the blame for the restless behavior of the slaves on the activities of the British under General Fuller during the British occupation of the Danish West Indies from March

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[25]DSA, VGRGT, Dokumenter vedkommende Kommissionen til Negerhandelens bedre Indretning og Ophaevelse, A. B. Bentzon, "Om Negerne paa de danske Øer i Vestindien," St. Croix, July 24, 1802, pp. 1-3.

1801 to February 1802.[26] Fuller's administration reduced the slaves' respect for and fear of the power of the Danish colonial authorities, according to Bentzon. Fuller had publicly urged the slaves to come to him with their complaints and promised them justice; and non-Danish overseers, usually drawn from the lower classes, displayed open contempt for Denmark and encouraged disrespect for Denmark among the slaves. Yet, Bentzon concluded, a slave revolt could probably be avoided if the slaves were not so badly overworked and starved that they saw no alternative to rebellion. He therefore proposed that reforms be implemented as soon as possible in order to save the colonies from destruction. The suggestions he made show the continued harshness of slave treatment and indicate the failure of gradual emancipation to bring about amelioration. Bentzon argued that (1) slave rations should be specified by law; (2) the slaves should be guaranteed garden plots of a specific size and at least one day every two weeks to work their gardens; (3) the length of the work day should be limited; (4) Sundays and four religious holidays should be set aside as days of rest; (5) after the third month of pregnancy, no slave woman should have to engage in heavy field work--such as cutting the cane or digging holes for planting cane--or suffer corporal punishment, especially whipping; (6) specific rations should be provided for each baby which survived for three months; (7) efforts should be made to encourage slaves on each plantation to establish stable sexual relationships with a partner on the same plantation so

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[26]For details see Vibaek, Dansk Vestindien, 1755-1848, pp. 219-226.

that they would not have to walk one or two miles every evening after work to spend the night with a spouse on another plantation, for this traveling weakened the slaves and diminished their energy for work in the fields the next day. "It is obvious, moreover, that this movement during the night of perhaps half the slaves in the islands provides an occasion for disorder, dissipation, and sometimes for dangerous gatherings [Det falder desuden i Øjene, at denne Bevaegelse ved Nattetid af maaskee Halvparten af Landets Negere giver Anledning til Uorden, Disipation, og undertiden til farlige Sammenkomster]." He added that no law could compel the slaves to abandon their evening journeys, and he thereby agreed with the statement of Miecke in 1792 (see above, p. 194) that it would be dangerous to attempt to restrict the slaves' sexual freedom. Bentzon wrote: "In compensation for all of the real rights which the slave has lost he demands with unbending firmness the right to seek out over the entire island as many wives as he pleases, and force in this matter will not only prove useless, but, perhaps especially among the Africans, might result in the most fatal occurrences [Tvang vilde her ej aleene vaere unyttig, men endog maaskee isaer hos Afrikanerne fulgt af de fataliste Tildragelser]."[27]

One assumption of the Committee on the Slave Trade was that encouragement of slave marriages would improve the birth rate, an

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[27]Bentzon, "Om Negerne paa de danske Øer i Vestindien," pp. 6-14. Bentzon urged adoption of a policy implemented on Jamaica in 1792 which sought to keep plantation owners from giving a slave more than thirty-nine lashes and from repeating the punishment until the wounds had healed.

approach to the population problem that was considered particularly important in view of the fact that the low birth rate was blamed as the primary cause of the failure of the slave population to maintain itself.[28] Bentzon wrote that he had seen successful slave marriages, whose salutary contributions to population growth and morality should suffice to convince every slave owner of the need to promote such unions whenever possible. Yet many owners failed to do so. More serious than the lack of support for slave marriages was another evil: the continued practice of selling slaves by planters to pay debts, which not only interfered with family life, but kept the slaves from becoming more attached to the plantation on which they worked and lived and from developing a greater sense of self-esteem.[29] Even Walterstorff's proposals of monetary awards to persons who produced the best designs for ideal slave hospitals and nurseries, which planters would then be encouraged to adopt by special premiums from the government, came to nothing.[30]

Bentzon's proposals for laws to help the slaves actually had a dual purpose. He wanted "to make slavery easier on the slave and safer for the planter [at gjøre Slaveriet lettere for Negeren og sikkrere for Planteren]", but he anticipated strong opposition to any legally binding ameliorative measures not only from "masters and

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[28]Allerunterthänigste Vorstellung of the Committee on the Slave Trade, December 28, 1791, pp. 33ff.

[29]Bentzon, "Om Negerne paa de danske Øer i Vestindien," pp. 13-16.

[30]Oxholm, De danske vestindiske Øers Tilstand, p. 32.

overseers whose savagery and stubborness [vildhed og egenraadighed]" the laws sought to restrain but also from "decent-minded, short-sighted men [veltaenkende . . . kortsynede Maend] who fail to realize that in the voluntary sacrifice of part of their authority lies the guarantee for the essential power which will remain theirs [at i Resignation af en Deel af deres Magt, ligger Guarantien for den vaesentlige som er tilbage]."[31]

The plans of 1792 for making instruction in the Christian religion more readily available to the slaves had come to little, as the Moravians resisted assuming responsibility for educating the slaves. Only one additional mission station was constructed on St. Croix.[32] The Moravians' exclusive concern was with saving souls. Indeed, Bentzon thought "Their teaching . . . is not poorly designed for a slave, who, in the notion of the enjoyment he can expect in Heaven, forgets the evil reality bestowed upon him on earth [Deres Laere . . . er ikke ilde beregnet for Traellen, som i Ideen, om den Nydelse han haaber hisset, glemmer det onde Virkeligheden tildeelte ham her.]," and he described the Moravians as persons who taught the doctrine of "unlimited resignation [ubegraensede Resignation]."[33]

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[31]Bentzon, "Om Negerne paa de danske Øer i Vestindien," pp. 35 and 37.

[32]Lawaetz, Brødremenighedens Mission: Dansk-Vestindien, 1769-1848, pp. 133ff.

[33]Bentzon, "Om Negerne paa de danske Øer i Vestindien," pp. 34-35. A Danish Lutheran missionary on St. Thomas showed at least some humanitarian concern for the slaves by protesting against the practice of selling slaves at public auctions. See DSA, VGRGT, Dokumenter vedkommende Kommissionen til Negerhandelens bedre

In 1792 Walterstorff and Oxholm had warned the Committee on the Slave Trade that it would be difficult if not impossible to increase the slaves' birth rate and lower their death rate to achieve a preponderance of births over deaths. Oxholm had again expressed his doubts in 1797 in De danske Vestindiske Øers Tilstand. As January 1, 1803, the date set for abolition, drew closer, others began to urge a continuation of the slave trade. The Commission for the Liquidation of the West Indian Debt pointed out to the Committee on the Slave Trade that the continued excess of slave deaths over births threatened to ruin the plan for establishing a self-sustaining labor force in the islands.[34] A member of the debt committee who had spent twenty-two years in the Danish West Indies and also visited the Danish forts on the Gold Coast, Konferensraad J. F. Heinrich, urged the Committee on the Slave Trade to permit a continuation of the slave trade to the Danish islands. He argued that abolition would result in a declining and overworked slave population, for the planters would drive their slaves to maintain the higher levels of production achieved during the 1790s when there was a steadily growing labor force. After assuring the committee of his sympathy with the Crown's goal of improving slave treatment, he warned that abolition would lead to a deterioration of the slaves'

Indretning og Ophaevelse, letter from General Customs Department to Committee on Slave Trade, June 9, 1798, p. 1.

[34]DSA, VGRGT, Dokumenter vedkommende Kommissionen til Negerhandelens bedre Indretning og Ophaevelse, letter from Dikrektionen for den Vestindiske Gaelds Likvidation to Committee on Slave Trade, written sometime in 1800, pp. 3-4.

living standards. The planters, pressured by their creditors, would be compelled to work their slaves "without mercy," for the planters thought only of the next twelve to fifteen years, and "in that period they will seek to become wealthy enough to return to Europe."[35] Heinrich suggested that the Danish forts on the Gold Coast could be abandoned if their maintenance was too costly, and slaves for the Danish islands could be purchased elsewhere. One or two slave ships a year would suffice to supply the Danish islands.[36]

Bentzon, too, urged continuation of the slave trade, as well as a resumption of the loans to planters to buy slaves, for he felt these measures would make the planters sympathetic to the laws he proposed to improve slave treatment and thereby make possible at some future date a labor force no longer in need of replenishment from Africa.[37] Ten years after the abolition edict he was using the argument that still more time was needed for the islands to prepare for abolition.

In February 1802 a breach was made in the abolition edict's stipulation that participation by Danish subjects in all aspects of the slave trade outside the Danish West Indies was to cease with the

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[35]DSA, VGRGT, Dokumenter vedkommende Kommissionen til Negerhandelens bedre Indretning og Ophaevelse, letter from Konferensraad J. F. Heinrich to Committee on the Slave Trade, Copenhagen, March 11, 1801, pp. 1-4.

[36]Ibid., p. 6.

[37]Bentzon, "Om Negerne paa de danske Øer i Vestindien," p. 38.

beginning of 1803. The General Customs Department at that time approved the request of two Danish slavers to purchase slaves on the Gold Coast later in 1802 and sell them in the Danish West Indies after January 1, 1803, so long as the ships' captains could prove that the slaves had been purchased in 1802.[38]

On July 1, 1802, seventy-five planters, working through the St. Croix Burger Council, signed an appeal to the Crown urging continuation of the slave trade during 1803, 1804, and 1805 and provision for further loans for purchasing slaves.[39] In a letter accompanying the planters' appeal, the government of the Danish West Indies showed itself sympathetic with the planters. The colonial government said that the Danish islands had not yet obtained a sufficient number of slaves. The government agreed with the planters' contention that an epidemic in 1799 that killed many slaves, a crop failure in 1800, and confusion caused by the English occupation of the islands in 1801 had prevented the planters from purchasing as many slaves as they needed and from making use of the remainder of the Crown loan for buying slaves. The government concluded: "It would . . . be of great help to the planters if their appeal were approved."[40]

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[38]DSA, VGRGT, Dokumenter vedkommende Kommissionen til Negerhandelens bedre Indretning og Ophaevelse, letter from General Customs Department to Committee on the Slave Trade, February 15, 1802, pp. 1-2.

[39]DSA, VGRGT, Vestindisk Journal, 1803, No. 740, "Til Kongen," St. Croix, July 1, 1802, p. 2.

[40]DSA, VGRGT, Vestindisk Journal, 1803, No. 140, letter from government of Danish West Indies to General Customs Department, St. Croix, September 30, 1802, pp. 1-2.

The planters praised the loan granted them by the Crown for buying slaves and said that because of it the plantations had acquired the badly needed manpower they had hitherto lacked. Furthermore, they wrote, the increase in the number of slaves had lightened the labor of the blacks. This argument that additional numbers of slaves served to ease the burden of the slave population assumes that planters did not use those extra hands to expand production in order to pay the debts incurred in acquiring those extra slaves. Oxholm indicates, however, an increase in acreage planted in cane did occur between 1792-96 (see p. 204 above). The planters assured the Crown that "Most of Your Royal Majesty's intentions in granting the loans would have been realized, if only physical as well as political misfortunes, which were equally unavoidable and unpredictable, had not combined to place hindrances in the way of carrying out your Majesty's intentions and stopped progress on the plantations." The epidemic of 1799 had reduced the ranks of the plantation slaves, the crop failure of 1800 "prevented the planters from making up the losses by buying new slaves," and the English occupation of the islands and the resultant confusion in 1801 again kept the planters from fulfilling their intention of buying more slaves. Further aid from the Crown was therefore essential in order to make more improvements on the plantations and to prevent the destruction of those improvements already made. In what amounted to undisguised blackmail, the planters warned that if the Crown failed to provide them with aid, "The most harmful consequences will result not only for these colonies but also for

that part of the mother country's trade and shipping which depends on the prosperity of the colonies."[41] Only by continuing the slave trade for three more years and providing the planters with loans to buy slaves during that time could the situation be saved.

The planters' appeal and the colonial government's letter were delayed en route, and only in the spring of 1803 did they reach the General Customs Department in Copenhagen.[42] The department requested an opinion on the matter from the Committee on the Slave Trade. The department urged the committee to respond promptly, for it would take time to prepare slave ships for the journey to Africa if the planters' request were granted. One merchant had already asked permission to send a ship to the Gold Coast to buy slaves.[43]

The Committee on the Slave Trade, dominated by Schimmelmann, was thus given a chance to admit that its report of December 28, 1791, endorsing a plan for gradual abolition, had been mistaken or at least premature. The committee could have conceded that unforeseen circumstances had made it necessary to resume the slave trade. But if the committee abandoned abolition in 1803, would the Danish slave trade ever end? Would the planters ever feel secure

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[41]"Til Kongen," pp. 1-2. The epidemic of 1799 could not have been as serious as alleged, as the death rate for slaves on St. Croix that year was not unusually high. (See p. 220 above.)

[42]DSA, VGRGT, Om Negerhandelens Afskaffelse, General Customs Department's Allerunderdanigst Forestilling on the planters' appeal for continuing the slave trade, May 15, 1804, p. 2.

[43]DSA, VGRGT, Dokumenter vedkommende Kommissionen til Negerhandelens bedre Indretning, Letter from General Customs Department to Committee on the Slave Trade, March 31, 1803, pp. 1-2.

enough to accept abolition without vigorous protest?

In the meantime, an important court decision in Copenhagen showed a lack of sympathy for the plight of slaves brought to Denmark from the West Indies. On May 31, 1802, a Copenhagen court [Københavnske Hof-og Stadsret) issued a ruling in a case involving two runaway slaves who had been brought by their owners from St. Croix to Copenhagen and who had subsequently sought to avoid being sent back to the West Indies. The court ruled that, according to the law of the Danish West Indies, the slaves were the legal property of their owners and that their residence in Denmark did not affect their status; therefore, their owners were free to send them back to the islands.[44] This decision came thirty years after Lord Chief

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[44]Knud Waaben, "A. S. Ørsted og negerslaverne i København," Juristen, 46 (1964), 321ff. One of the slaves was owned by Henriette Schimmelmann, widow of Ernst Schimmelmann's cousin Heinrich Ludwig Ernst Schimmelmann, who had managed the Schimmelmann plantations and served briefly as governor general of the Danish West Indies. Waaben estimates there were at least fifty Negro house slaves in Copenhagen, along with some free colored. August Hennings, a boyhood friend of Schimmelmann who visited Copenhagen for several months in 1802, complained that the presence in Copenhagen of about 400 slaves, presumably from a slave ship, was causing problems. They were constantly escaping, and some had reportedly broken into Schimmelmann's summer residence, Sølyst. (Der Sclaven-Unfug dauert noch fort. Sie sollen in Seelust eingebrochen. Man rechnet, dass von 400 Sclaven, die hier in Eisen sind, wöchentlich zwei ausbrechen, so schlecht werden sie bewacht.). The streets of Copenhagen were not safe, he wrote, because of the presence of drunken slaves. A bureaucrat from a provincial town, Hennings probably exaggerated the danger posed by the slaves. He was obviously astounded by the presence of blacks in the homes of Danish West Indians. Though Hennings associated with top government figures, including Crown Prince Frederik and former West Indian officials, he never mentioned any discussion among them of the impending abolition of the slave trade. See L. Bobé, ed., August Hennings Dagbog under hans Ophold i København 1802 (Copenhagen: Nordisk Forlag, 1934, pp. 153 and 155, entries for September 12 and 14, 1802.

Justice Mansfield had ruled in the Somerset case that slaves could not be removed from England against their will.[45]

Schimmelmann refused to agree to a resumption of the slave trade. The trade had been abolished at the start of 1803 in accordance with the abolition edict, though, as mentioned above, the sale of African slaves brought to the Danish West Indies was permitted in 1803, so long as the slaves had been purchased in Africa prior to the end of 1802. The committee wrote that it did not believe it was in a position to take a definite position regarding resumption of the slave trade, as neither the planters' appeal nor the colonial government's letter contained sufficient grounds for granting the request. In particular, there was not enough data available on the slave population of the Danish islands. The committee therefore recommended postponing a decision on the planters' request until detailed figures on the population of the Danish West Indies had been received in Copenhagen. When the population data were available, the committee promised to study the matter and give its opinion on whether the planters' appeal should be granted. At that time the committee would also reserve for itself the right to express its views regarding other items concerning the present condition of the slaves.[46] Schimmelmann knew it would take at least a year to assemble

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[45]Anstey, The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition, pp. 244-45.

[46]DSA, VGRGT, Vestindisk Journal, 1803, No. 181, letter from Committee on the Slave Trade to General Customs Department, April 5, 1803, pp. 1-2.

the requested population data and send the lists to Copenhagen, and in the meantime the abolition edict would remain in effect.

On October 6, 1803, Governor Mühlenfels sent to Copenhagen the census figures for 1801 and 1802 obtained from the tax rolls, indicating St. Croix had only 27,006 slaves in 1802, a figure lower than the colonial government in 1792 had said was needed before abolition.[47] But these figures were always suspect, as the planters were thought to consistently list fewer slaves than they actually held in order to pay lower taxes.

The Committee on the Slave Trade, clearly in no hurry, finally prepared a report on the future of the slave trade and sent it to the General Customs Department on April 9, 1804. This time the committee could not merely seek a delay but had to take a stand; it did so, strongly, against resumption of the slave trade and loans to planters for buying slaves. The committee said its unanimous opinion was that an extension of the period during which slaves could be imported into the Danish islands would "in no way be appropriate":

> It would no doubt only strengthen the unfortunately widespread belief noticeable among the public in the West Indies that the abolition edict can not or will not be implemented and that, as a result of repeated postponements, it will be completely forgotten [ved gientagne Udsaettelser aldeles skulle gaae i Glemme]; and instead of the time thus granted being used by the planters to prepare themselves for abolition, the result would perhaps be that they would no longer bother themselves [with preparing for abolition] but, on the contrary, would let

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[47] DSA, VGRGT, Om Negerhandelens Afskaffelse, Population data sent from St. Croix by Governor Mühlenfels to General Customs Department, October 6, 1803.

> everything continue in its old course, contenting themselves with the hope that the command of the abolition edict would never be seriously observed [at Forordningens Bud aldrig alvorligen ville overholdes]. Experience during the ten years granted before the edict was to take effect can only confirm this conjecture [Erfaringen i de ti Aar som have vaeret tilstaaet, førend Forordningen skulle traede i Kraft, kan vel ikke andet end stadfaeste denne Formodning.]
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> Thus, in the Committee's opinion, the only question is whether the abolition edict will be maintained or whether it will be repealed [Spørgsmaalet kan altsaa efter Commissionens Formeening allene vaere, om Forordningen skal vedligeholdes eller om den skal ophaeves], and the committee, far from having altered its detailed, carefully reasoned opinion put forth twelve years ago regarding abolition of the slave trade [og Commissionen, langt fra at have forandret sin for tolv Aar siden over denne Gienstand fremsatte og udførligen motiverede Meening], considers that, in view of the recent events on St. Domingue, the abolition of the slave trade is now more important than ever before [finder for naevaerende Tid, efter de sidste Begivenheder paa St. Domingo, Negerhandelens Ophaevelse mere vigtig end nogensinde før].[48]

Having given a forceful reaffirmation of its original endorsement of abolition and bolstered its belief in the urgent need for abolition by referring to the threat of slave revolt, a threat which had been emphasized by Bentzon less than two years before in his "Om Negerne paa de danske Øer i Vestindien," the committee softened its tone somewhat and admitted that carrying out this highly important policy might involve serious difficulties and lead to a crisis for the Danish colonies. The problems inherent in so major an undertaking as abolition were exacerbated by the planters' prejudice and failure to cooperate with the Crown. In

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[48]DSA, VGRGT, Dokumenter vedkommende Kommissionen til Negerhandelens bedre Indretning og Ophaevelse, Pro Memoria from Committee on Slave Trade to General Customs Department, April 9, 1804, pp. 1-2.

order to avoid or minimize any difficulties arising from abolition, therefore, "I, Count Schimmelmann, have drawn up and sent to the committee a plan, which the committee has approved in full [har jeg, Grev Schimmelmann, udarbejdet og til Commissionen indeleveret en Plan, som denne aldeles har bifaldt]."[49]

Schimmelmann's plan argued that if the West Indian colonies had not from the start been subjected to the short-sighted spirit of speculators, there would now be an oversupply of workers rather than the present supposed undersupply. He suggested that only a long-range approach could solve any labor shortage that might exist now or in the future, though he professed doubt that the 1802 population figures indicated a shortage of slaves. The Crown, wrote Schimmelmann, should take over several plantations in the Danish West Indies and cultivate them with the goal of increasing the slave population on them by natural means and of improving the treatment and "civilization" of the slaves, without altering the workers' status as slaves bound to the plantations. This arrangement for what Schimmelmann called a colonial institute would have as its main purpose the creation of model plantations to show the planters how slaves ought to be treated in order to guide them to what was described as a more moral way of life, with greater emphasis on marriage and family ties and greater personal interest in the cultivation of the land. The colonial institute would also achieve a population growth which would eliminate the need to import any

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[49]Ibid., p. 3.

more slaves and would provide workers to help those planters who lacked a sufficient number of slaves to cultivate their plantations.[50]

The idea for creating a model plantation funded by the Crown had been the centerpiece of Hans West's "Plan til ved et enkelt Forsøg at befordre Mark-Negernes Vel" which West sent to Schimmelmann and the General Customs Department in 1791. In his own proposal West had urged that he be placed in charge of the model plantation. Yet, in a letter to Johan Bülow, Crown Prince Frederik's advisor and former tutor, written shortly after sending his proposal to Copenhagen, West expressed doubts about the feasibility of his plan and said he would not be distressed if the plan were ignored (Jer er . . . aldeles ikke aengstelig, om min Plan ikke skulde finde approbation), as it was for more than a decade. He admitted he had constructed his proposal "in part because I hope that the General Customs Department will soon free me from the difficulties that accompany a teaching position in this part of the world for a person with a weak chest [deels fordi jeg haaber, at Kammeret snart vil befrie mig for de Besvaerligheder, der følger med et Laere-Embede i denne Himmelegn for den, der har et svagt Bryst]."[51]

Though West had privately doubted the feasibility of his own

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[50]Frederik Thaarup, ed., Udførlig Vejledning til det danske Monarkies Statistik saaledes som samme var i Slutningen af Aar 1813 (Part VII; Copenhagen, 1819), Summary of Schimmelmann's plan of April 1804 for a colonial institute, pp. 682-84.

[51]Letter of August 26, 1791, from Hans West on St. Croix to Johan Bülow in Denmark, printed in Niels Breitenstam, "Hans West," Kulturminder, Copenhagen, I (1955), 124-25.

proposal for a model plantation, Schimmelmann not only adopted West's basic idea in 1804 but carried it farther than West had. Concerned by the failure of the slaves' birth rate to exceed or even offset their death rate, he was looking for some means of avoiding a resumption of the slave trade and of staving off the critics of abolition who said more slaves were needed in the Danish islands. Schimmelmann therefore emphasized the role the model plantations should play in producing a surplus of slaves who could be hired out as day laborers to planters needing additional slaves. Marriages were to be encouraged, with female slaves freed from hard physical labor while they were pregnant and, after giving birth, for as long as they were nursing their babies. Married slaves should (1) be able to inherit their partner's property, (2) never be separated involuntarily unless one of them had committed a criminal offense, and (3) enjoy the presence and the respect of their children, with obedience to and deference for their parents being inculcated in slave children as part of the latter's education. Although he must have remembered the reluctance the Moravians had shown twelve years before to undertake a similar responsibility, Schimmelmann proposed that the slaves should be taught Christianity by the Moravian Brethren. Elderly slaves should perform only light tasks in keeping with their diminished strength, and adequate food, clothing, housing, and water should be available to all the slaves on the model plantations.

The colonial institute would be managed by a royal bureau in Copenhagen, with an inspector stationed on each plantation to

guarantee proper treatment of the slaves. With the right care and with emphasis on marriage and family, the population of the institute would grow, or so Schimmelmann assumed. In the meantime, some of the slaves to work the institute's plantations would have to be brought from Africa under strict regulations which would ensure them against mistreatment on the ships. Schimmelmann's plan, if adopted, would thus involve a temporary reopening of the slave trade. Yet, he argued, the success of his plan would guarantee the long-range success of the abolition edict of 1792. Eventually those slaves brought from Africa to serve on the plantations of the colonial institute, having done their part for population growth in the island, would be allowed to return to Africa if they wished.[52] It is impossible to judge whether Schimmelmann really believed in his proposal, far-fetched as it was. Perhaps he was simply using it to ward off those favoring resumption of an unrestricted slave trade, a slave trade over which there were no regulations to mitigate mistreatment of slaves during the Middle Passage. Yet it remains uncertain why the man primarily responsible for the abolition edict fourteen years earlier now proposed creating royal plantations and stocking them with new slaves from Africa who would breed, preferably within the bounds of matrimony, a surplus of slaves who would be used to alleviate labor shortages on the various plantations in the Danish islands.

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[52]Schimmelmann's plan, in Udførlig Vejledning til det danske Monarkies Statistik, pp. 684-92.

The Committee on the Slave Trade, seeking the testimony of an expert, sent Schimmelmann's plan to Walterstorff, who had returned to Copenhagen and become a close advisor to Crown Prince Frederik. Walterstorff finished his thirty-eight-page critique of the plan on April 21, 1804, and sent it to the Committee on the Slave Trade. He still owned a plantation on St. Croix, so his views, not surprisingly, reflected the best interests of the planters. Walterstorff's need to show deference to Schimmelmann was now minimal, and after praising Schimmelmann's motives in drawing up the plan, Walterstorff began to criticize the proposal for a "colonial institute" as impractical and insufficient for the labor needs of the Danish islands. He argued that at least 6,000 additional slaves were needed on St. Croix, both to secure the welfare of the planters and to promote Danish foreign trade. Schimmelmann's plan called for having the Crown purchase as many as eight plantations with about 1,600 slaves on them and for bringing in another 1,000 slaves from Africa so that the total number of slaves on the colonial institute would reach 2,600. But Walterstorff believed the institute would need at least 4,000 more African slaves in order to be successful, especially if slaves were hired out to planters as day laborers. New slaves required very special treatment, however, and no plantation could care for more than fifty in one year. So, even if eight plantations comprised the institute, only 400 slaves could be imported each year, which meant ten years would be required to import the 4,000 African slaves he felt the

institute would need.[53]

Schimmelmann's plan had included a proposal that more land be devoted to growing food for the slaves, but Walterstorff argued against any reduction in the amount of land planted in sugar cane. He contended that sugar cane was the most profitable as well as the safest crop: "It is only as a sugar colony that St. Croix has any value for Denmark, and one therefore should not seek to curtail sugar cultivation but rather attempt to extend it [Det er ikkun som en Sukker-Colonie, at St. Croix har nogen Vaerdie for Moderlandet, og at man desaarsag paa ingen Maade bør indskraenke Sukker-Avlingen men snarere søge at udvide den]."[54]

Repeating the same arguments he had advanced twelve years earlier to explain the low birth rate among the slaves, Walterstorff placed the blame not on mistreatment by the masters but on self-induced abortions by slave women and the preponderance of males in the slave population. In effect, he believed that it would be impossible to increase the birth rate and achieve a self-sustaining slave population. Only a continuation of the slave trade could offset the evil effects of the slaves' sexual immorality (Løsagtighed), for the planters were powerless to compel the slaves to settle into those regular monogamous relationships which were most conducive to the production and survival

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[53]DSA, VGRGT, Dokumenter vedkommende Kommissionen til Negerhandelens bedre Indretning og Ophaevelse, Walterstorff's critique of Schimmelmann's plan for a colonial institute, Copenhagen, April 21, 1804, pp. 1-6.

[54]Ibid., pp. 12-20.

of babies.[55] Yet in a letter to the committee completed one day after his critique of Schimmelmann's proposal for a colonial institute, Walterstorff said he thought a natural increase of the slave population was attainable, but "One would have to be satisfied with a slow approach to that goal [Man maae vaere fornøjet med langsomt at naerme sig Maalet]."[56]

Walterstorff undermined his argument that many more slaves were needed to cultivate the sugar plantations when he wrote that Schimmelmann was mistaken in believing that two slaves were needed for each acre planted in sugar. On his plantation he had 164 slaves, with only 130 of them capable of working the 300 acres planted in cane. He added: "And my slaves work without any strain [Og mine Negere arbeide uden nogen Anstrengelse]." He then raised yet another point which weakened the view that more slaves were needed: he rejected Schimmelmann's assertion that married female slaves could do only half the work of other slaves. Even when pregnant, according to Walterstorff, female slaves could perform lighter tasks on the plantations; and a month after giving birth, a slave woman could be back in the fields cutting cane.[57]

Despite his opposition to much of Schimmelmann's plan and

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[55]Ibid., pp. 12-20.

[56]DSA, VGRGT, Dokumenter vedkommende Kommissionen til Negerhandelens bedre Indretning og Ophaevelse, Letter from Walterstorff to the Committee on the Slave Trade, Copenhagen, April 12, 1804, p. 1.

[57]Walterstorff's critique of Schimmelmann's plan for a colonial institute, pp. 24-25.

his belief that, unless altered considerably, it was not viable, Walterstorff admitted that the plan might work if combined with a temporary resumption of the slave trade, in accordance with the desires of the St. Croix planters.[58] What he really wanted was a resumption of the slave trade; Schimmelmann's plan was a nuisance that might divert attention from the real needs of the planters.

Walterstorff warned of the risk to public order of having unemployed slaves on the plantations of the institute during times when the planters did not need them as day laborers. He added that it would be important to avoid improving the condition of the slaves on the institute's plantations to the point where slaves on other plantations became dissatisfied with their status (Ved at forbedre Negernes Kaar paa Institutets Plantager, bør haves Hensyn til, at man ikke giør Negerne paa andre Plantager misfornøjede). He closed by politely conceding that Schimmelmann's plan, though in need of improvement, nevertheless bore the stamp of philanthropy and a gentle spirit (baerer Geniets og Philanthropiens Praeg).[59]

Walterstorff's letter of April 22 to the Committee on the Slave Trade urged resumption of the slave trade: "I am and have always been of the opinion that the slave trade of the European nations ought to be abolished, . . . but this desire is naturally based on the assumption that the inhabitants of Africa would thereby

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[58]Walterstorff's letter to the Committee on the Slave Trade, April 22, 1804, p. 10.

[59]Walterstorff's critique of Schimmelmann's plan for a colonial institute, pp. 37-38.

be made happier."[60] Abolition of the Danish slave trade would not accomplish this, for only 1,000 to 1,200 new slaves were needed each year in the Danish West Indies, a small number in comparison with the total number of slaves taken from the Guinea Coast each year. The slave traders of Bristol and Liverpool, who had supplied slaves to the Danish islands in recent years, would continue to take slaves from Africa and sell them on other islands. When for any reason the Danish islands had been unable to buy slaves, the slave ships merely sailed on to Jamaica and Cuba, and this was unfortunate for the slaves: "I am totally convinced that the slaves on those ships would have been less unhappy if they had been sold on the Danish islands [Jeg siger med fuld Overbeviisning, at Negerne paa de Skibe vilde have vaeret mindre ulykkelige vare de blevne solgte paa de danske Øer]."[61]

Having traveled to all of the West Indian islands from Puerto Rico to Barbados, Walterstorff said he knew from experience that slaves received the best treatment on the Danish islands. Indeed, the only complaint he had ever heard about Governor Mühlenfels was that he was too concerned with the welfare of the slaves. Walterstorff, not satisfied with proclaiming the Danish West Indies the best Caribbean destination any slave could hope for, added that the slaves in the Danish islands would suffer if the trade were

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[60]Walterstorff's letter to the Committee on the Slave Trade, April 22, 1804, p. 1.

[61]Ibid., p. 5.

abolished, for their ranks would thin gradually, leaving fewer and fewer hands to do the same amount of work.[62] The implication, of course, was that slaves presently in the islands would benefit from prolonging the slave trade rather than from abolition. Walterstorff ignored the assumption of the Committee on the Slave Trade that abolition would lead to improved slave treatment.

Walterstorff noted that the Danish example on abolition had not been followed by any other nation, but praised the work of the committee in 1791 as fair and just. Unfortunately, as the planters had pointed out in their appeal of July 1, 1802, the ten-year period during which the islands were to prepare for abolition had been shortened by events in 1799, 1800, and 1801 which had left the planters unable to buy all the slaves they needed. The loan for buying slaves had also been discontinued, though Walterstorff did not mention that nearly all the funds set aside for it had been loaned out by March 1799. Nor did he mention the allegations concerning misuse of loan funds by some members of the loan committee in the islands, nor the failure of the colonial government to supply the Crown with data on the slave population during the 1790s, including information on those slaves purchased by means of the loan. He tried to explain the failure of planters to buy more of the slaves offered for sale on St. Croix in recent years by arguing that the planters had lacked sufficient credit. Walterstorff said that he had

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[62] Ibid., p. 6.

no self-interest in a resumption of the slave trade, as the slaves now on his plantation were sufficient to maintain production, and births on it normally exceeded deaths; thus, motivated solely by the public interest, he asked the committee to approve a three-year extension of the slave trade, beginning with the date the extension was publicly announced in the islands, and said that if a resumption of the trade were permitted, a new royal loan fund to help planters buy slaves would have to be established.[63]

Schimmelmann responded to Walterstorff's critique of his plan for a colonial institute and to Walterstorff's argument in favor of resuming the slave trade and providing a new loan to buy slaves for three years by sending a pro-memoria to the General Customs Department along with a reply to the criticism of his plan. Schimmelmann told the department that, although Walterstorff's opinions deserved attention because of his knowledge of West Indian affairs, it was important to avoid further delay in a matter already sufficiently discussed by both sides. The committee therefore left it to the department to present to the Crown for a final decision the results of the various studies regarding the planters' appeal for a three-year extension of the slave trade.[64]

Schimmelmann's response to Walterstorff, entitled "Einige

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[63] Ibid., pp. 5, 7-10.

[64] DSA, VGRGT, Om Negerhandelens Afskaffelse, Pro Memoria from Committee on the Slave Trade, to General Customs Department, May 1, 1804, pp. 1-2.

Bemerkungen," accompanied the Pro Memoria. He said that if Walterstorff was correct in his belief that 6,000 more slaves were needed on St. Croix, and if approval were given to import slaves for three more years, all 6,000 slaves would have to be imported in three years, a formidable if not impossible task. He implicitly ruled out extending the slave trade for more than three years. Furthermore, as Walterstorff believed each slave would cost 500 rigsdaler dansk courant, a sum of three million rigsdaler (Thaler) would be needed. Even if the Crown accepted Walterstorff's view that Crown loans to the planters were essential, it would be difficult to provide so large a sum. And what if another crop failure occurred during the three years? Also, Danish slave traders could meet only a small part of the demand for 6,000 slaves, so that most of the money used to buy slaves would go to English slavers and thus hurt Denmark's balance of trade. Another problem would be the sudden infusion into the islands of so large a number of Africans. And, as many of the new slaves would merely be used to replace a decline in the slave population, improvement in the treatment of slaves would continue to be postponed.[65]

Schimmelmann was trying to ward off the proposals of Walterstorff, the colonial government led by Mühelenfels, and the St. Croix planters, but having made his points, he left it to the General Customs Department to offer more vigorous and perhaps decisive

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[65]DSA, VGRGT, Om Negerhandelens Afskaffelse, Einige Bemerkungen from Ernst Schimmelmann to General Customs Department, May 1, 1804, pp. 1-4.

opposition to the foes of abolition. Always cautious and tending to favor compromise, he shied away from an all-out defense of the abolition edict, and he was aware that a forceful advocate of abolition was prepared to carry on the struggle within the department. Rosenstand-Goiske, who had been the department's secretary in 1792 when he had strongly endorsed abolition in Borgervennen, had continued to speak out in favor of reform measures during the 1790s, with several of his speeches being published in Minerva.[66] Now a commissioner (kommittéraad), he presented an eighteen-page Betaenkning to the department, arguing against granting permission for even a temporary, limited resumption of the slave trade. Rosenstand-Goiske, having no financial interest in the West Indies or the Danish sugar industry, could allow his moral aversion to the slave trade always to remain uppermost in his mind, while Schimmelmann could never quite free himself from the influence of his own investments in the colonies and their produce. Unlike Schimmelmann, Rosenstand-Goiske never felt a need to convince himself that the slave trade could be abolished without endangering the prosperity of the Danish islands and their trade with Denmark. For him a just cause assured a beneficent outcome.

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[66]Rosenstand-Goiske praised "gradual" abolition in a speech printed in the March 1795 edition of Minerva; he joined the Praemierselskab for den jødiske Ungdoms Anbringelse til Kunster og Haandvaerker and gave a speech praising the Crown's decision to allow Jews to join guilds, published in the April 1796 edition of Minerva; he lavishly praised "enlightenment" (Oplysning) and its value for the "common good" (Almeenvel), expressing great faith in the role of education as an agent of reform, in another speech published in Minerva in May 1797.

In his Betaenkning of April 24, he began with a reminder that the abolition edict had "gladdened the hearts of humanitarians in every nation [glaeddede oplyste Menneskevenner af hvert Folkeslag sig]" and added that the Crown, if it now surrendered to the demands of the West Indian planters, would disillusion those who in 1792 had applauded its humanitarian decision. Worse, a revocation of the abolition edict would mean losing the chance to abolish the slave trade and the horrors its continued existence involved, because if abolition were once delayed, there would always be other excuses for further postponement. Rosenstand-Goiske argued that the edict of March 16, 1792, should stand, as should all royal edicts, unless there were extremely persuasive reasons for tampering with it. He suggested that only "incontestable proof [uimodsigelige Beviser]" that the slave population could not sustain itself and maintain production in the islands without a continued infusion of new slaves from Africa should suffice to cancel the abolition edict. He hoped that abolition would compel absentee planters to live on their plantations, for resident planters were more likely to treat their slaves fairly. A resident planter was more likely to be "an attentive and fair head of family [en opmaerksom og retfaerdig Husfader]."[67] Rosenstand-Goiske's belief that slaves would benefit

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[67]DSA, VGRGT, Om Negerhandelens Afskaffelse, Rosenstand-Goiske's Betaenkning on the planters' appeal for a three-year extension of the slave trade, presented to General Customs Department, April 24, 1804, pp. 1-3. In an article in Minerva Rosenstand-Goiske praised the stern and just patriarchal slave master as one who knew each of his slaves and was present to see both that they did the work expected of them and that they were not overworked. Yet "Justice, even when connected with sternness, compels a person to respect his

from a reduction in absenteeism had some foundation in fact, as overseers were widely considered more inclined than the slaves' owners to physically abuse their charges, though he tended to exaggerate the extent to which paternalism could mitigate the evils of slavery, especially in the sugar islands with their gang slavery.

The planters had no case, he wrote, if the following two questions could be answered in the affirmative:

> "Can the cultivation of the islands always be maintained with the workers presently on the islands and with those they propagate [Kan Øernes Kultur stedse vedligeholdes ved de Arbeidere som Negerne paa Øerne selv og ved Formerelse frembringe]?" Do the islands now have a slave population sufficient for cultivation [Have Øerne for Tiden et til Culturen tilstraekkeligt Antal Negere?]?"[68]

Rosenstand-Goiske said the December 28, 1791, report of the Committee on the Slave Trade had answered the first question affirmatively, so he would devote his attention solely to seeking an answer to the second. He referred to his article published in Borgervennen ("Brev fra Landet") in 1792, noting that his conclusions on the potential growth of the slave population had not been publicly refuted, and then proceeded to argue that no more slaves were needed.

Rosenstand-Goiske's determination to defend the abolition edict led him to contradict himself, as he wrote in his Betaenkning

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superior in a way that is perhaps more binding than gentleness when the latter is combined with weakness [Retfaerdighed, endog med Straenghed forbunden, aftvinger Mennesket en Agtelse for sin Overmand, som maaskee binder staerkere, end Mildhed, naar den er forenet med Svaghed]." See Minerva, February 1805, "Om Negerhandelens Ophaevelse i Hensyn til de danske vestindiske Øer," p. 200.

[68]Rosenstand-Goiske's Betaenkning, April 24, 1804, p. 3.

of April 24 that the planters would save money by raising all their slaves instead of buying them from the slave ships.[69] But in a twelve-page follow-up report which he presented to the General Customs Department on April 27, he calculated that it cost a planter seventy rigsdaler more to raise a slave to the age of fourteen than to buy an adult slave brought in from Africa. This cost differential did not deter Rosenstand-Goiske from pressing his case for abolition, however, as he believed the extra cost should be "sacrificed on the altar of humanity [ofret paa Menneskehedens Alter]."[70]

Rosenstand-Goiske said the islands already had enough slaves, as indicated by the population figures which showed there were more slaves present than ever before and by the fact that only half of the slaves brought to St. Croix in 1803 had been sold there. If a real shortage had existed or been expected, he argued, all available slaves would have been purchased. If there were cases where individual planters still lacked as many slaves as they desired, their problem was presumably the result of failure to care properly for their slaves and to promote a higher birth rate among them in the years after 1792. Planters who had failed to prepare for abolition from 1792 through 1802 should not be rescued now by a revocation of

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[69] Ibid., p. 9.

[70] DSA, VGRGT, Om Negerhandelens Afskaffelse, Rosenstand-Goiske's Bemaerkninger explaining the assumptions on which he based his opposition to the planters' appeal for a resumption of the slave trade, April 27, 1804, pp. 6-7.

the abolition edict. Beneath his strident optimism Rosenstand-Goiske did harbor some doubts regarding the ability of the slave population to replace itself by reproduction alone; however, he believed it would take another ten to fifteen years' experience to provide proof one way or the other. The only concession he was willing to make to the planters was to promise them that if the islands lacked enough laborers after another ten years had passed, the reopening of the slave trade could be reconsidered.[71]

Rosenstand-Goiske had to mention Schimmelmann's plan for a colonial institute, which had been presented to the General Customs Department, and he lavishly praised its humanitarian spirit [saa indlysende et Beviis som den giver om Agtelse for Mennesket, og for Retfaerdighed og Mildhed, og saa klare som dens Grundsaetninger ere fremsatte, og saa mesterligen som dens Udarbeidelse viser sig), but said he personally lacked enough knowledge of West Indian affairs to make any specific comments on it.[72] He was probably suspicious of it, because it would necessitate a limited reopening of the slave trade, which he so strongly opposed. To support this contention one might note that the Forestilling the department presented to the Crown on May 15, 1804, though generally deferential towards Schimmelmann's proposals, said there was no need to import slaves

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[71]Rosenstand-Goiske's Betaenkning, April 24, 1804, pp. 8-12.

[72]Ibid., pp. 12-13.

for his colonial institute.[73] In commenting on the plan's emphasis on acquiring productive workers for the islands, Rosenstand-Goiske resurrected one of the topics discussed at length in 1792 and then allowed to fade: he urged imposition of a special tax on "excessive" house slaves; he thought 3,000 field slaves could be obtained if white families limited themselves to two house slaves each.[74]

In his criticism of absentee planters Rosenstand-Goiske provides a clue to his approach to slavery: he apparently regarded slavery as acceptable if the planter lived on the plantation, as if he were an independent farmer (Selv-Eierbonde), and looked after the needs and responded to the complaints of his workers as would a stern but just head of the household. The planters' wives should look after the workers' children during the day, "keeping an eye on their condition, cleanliness, and taking care of them while their mothers worked." Now, unfortunately, "The master and mistress answer the plaintive slave by saying: go to the overseer, for what do I have to do with you?"[75]

Absentee planters had to rely on overseers who consumed a large part of the profits of the plantation, with an average annual wage of 1,200 rigsdaler plus control of part of the plantation's

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[73]DSA, VGRGT, Om Negerhandelens Afskaffelse, General Customs Department's Allerunderdanigste Forestilling on the planters' appeal for a continuation of the slave trade, May 15, 1804, p. 31.

[74]Rosenstand-Goiske's Betaenkning, p. 16.

[75]Rosenstand-Goiske's Bemaerkninger to the General Customs Department, April 27, 1804, pp. 1-2.

provision grounds and a supply of Madeira wine. In order to cover the expenses incurred by having an overseer and still provide the absentee owner with a profit; the slaves had to work harder. He suggested that those absentee planters who found it impossible to reside on their plantations should sell their land to persons who would live on the plantations and take a direct interest in the welfare of the slaves. Prominent among such absentee planters were Walterstorff and Schimmelmann, the greatest of them all, but Rosenstand-Goiske did not mention them by name.[76]

He dismissed Walterstorff's argument that, because of its small size, abolition of the Danish slave trade would have no international impact and would not help Africa. Rosenstand-Goiske noted: "According to such reasoning, no improvement should take place in Denmark unless it also occurred in most of Europe; thus the stavnsbaand[77] would not have been abolished, and so forth [Altsaa efter slig Grundsaetning skulle ingen Forbedring finde Sted i Danmark, uden at den fandt sted over det meste af Europa, altsaa ikke Fødestavnsbaandet vaere ophaevet o.s.v.]." Unlike Walterstorff, Rosenstand-Goiske was sensitive to the value of even a small blow against the evil of the Atlantic slave trade: "Every evil that is abolished diminishes the total quantity of evil for all of humanity and benefits the individual saved from it [Ethvert haevet Onde formindsker Massen for den hele Menneskehed, og gavner

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[76] Ibid., p. 2 and pp. 10-11.

[77] For a discussion of the stavnsbaand see p. 44.

Individet som undgik samme.]."[78] After considering all the evidence, including population data from the West Indies, the planters' appeal, Mühlenfels' letter, Schimmelmann's plan for a colonial institute, Walterstorff's plea for reopening the slave trade, and Rosenstand-Goiske's Betankning and subsequent Bemaerkninger opposing even a temporary resumption of the trade, the department sent its report to the Crown on May 15, 1804.

The report, forty-four pages long, was a victory for Rosenstand-Goiske and a defeat for Walterstorff and the foes of abolition. Rosenstand-Goiske was able to convince the rest of the department to support his contention that the abolition edict of 1792 should continue in force and that Walterstorff's arguments for resuming the slave trade were seriously flawed.

The department's report presented an overview of the problem, listing the alternatives available to the Crown. After discussing at length and with sympathy Schimmelmann's plan, the department began its criticism of Walterstorff's belief that at least 6,000 additional field slaves were needed, noting that Walterstorff provided no proof for his contention. The only way of determining whether there was an actual shortage of slaves was to carefully study the population as it existed at the end of 1802, based on the tax rolls sent to Copenhagen in 1803 by Mühlenfels. The department commented that, as the figures derived from the tax rolls depended on the word of the

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[78]Rosenstand-Goiske's Bemaerkninger to the General Customs Department, April 27, 1804, p. 11.

planters themselves, their reliability was open to doubt. In 1792 Oxholm had reported there were 17,942 plantation slaves on St. Croix, 9,619 of them creoles and 8,323 African born. At the end of 1802, there were 22,404 plantation slaves on St. Croix, 11,328 creoles and 11,076 African born. This was an increase of 4,462 in the number of plantation slaves from 1792 to 1802. But in 1802 there were, according to the tax rolls, only 2,753 more African-born slaves than in 1792, despite the importation of twice that many slaves in the 1790s with help from the Crown loans, and many other Africans had been imported without use of the loan fund. The department expressed skepticism that the imported slaves could have suffered such a high mortality rate and noted that if the data were accurate, there was all the more reason for relying on creole slaves rather than Africans. But the point the department was really interested in making was that the planters were not giving accurate data on the number of slaves they owned. As evidence for this, the department pointed to the dramatic difference between the slave population as indicated by the tax rolls for 1799, 1801, and 1802, and St. Croix's slave imports as shown by the customs ledgers. The slave population of St. Croix was reportedly:

Year	Population
1798	26,634
1799	26,399
1801	26,454
1802	27,006

Yet the customs ledgers showed that in 1799, 3,132 slaves had been imported and retained on St. Croix, 793 in 1800, 61 the first two months of 1801, and 1,684 in 1802 for a total of 5,670.[79] The tax rolls showed 1,845 slave deaths in 1799, 1801, and 1802. The obvious conclusion was that the planters had not registered on the tax rolls the actual number of slaves they owned. "There is thus good reason for supposing that the number of slaves on St. Croix is presently much greater than that given [Der er da vel Aarsag til at formode, at Antallet af Negre paa St. Croix er nu langt større end det er opgivet]."[80]

The department showed its bias against Walterstorff and those seeking at least a temporary extension of the slave trade when it wrote that in 1792 the planters on St. Croix had said they needed 6,309 more slaves before the abolition edict took effect in 1803, failing to mention that Oxholm had raised the number needed to 8,000 and the St. Croix Burger Council to 10,000. According to the tax rolls for 1802, there were 4,462 more plantation slaves on St. Croix then than in 1792. Taking into account that more slaves were present than were listed on the rolls, it was reasonable to assume that the

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[79]Nearly all of the customs ledgers were subsequently destroyed, though the ledger for 1799 survives and confirms that the figure of 3,132 slave imports for 1799 is correct. See Green-Pedersen, "The Scope . . . of the Danish . . . Slave Trade," pp. 150ff.

[80]DSA, VGRGT, Om Negerhandelens Afskaffelse, General Customs Department's Allerunderdanigste Forestilling on the Planters' appeal for a continuation of the slave trade, May 15, 1804, pp. 19-21. Data were lacking on slave imports for the last ten months of 1801 because of the English takeover of the island, according to the department, Allerunderdanigste Forestilling, p. 24.

planters already had all the slaves they needed. The harvests of 1800 and 1801 were good, and that of 1802 excellent, indicating that the present slave population was capable of supplying the needed manpower. "It is therefore not apparent to the department why another 6,000 field slaves should be needed [Det er da ikke Kamret tydeligt, hvorledes endnu 6,000 Marknegre skulle behøves]."[81]

The department seized upon Walterstorff's statement--in his critique of Schimmelmann's plan--that it was erroneous to believe that two slaves were needed for each acre planted in cane, as Walterstorff was able to plant more than 300 acres in cane with a labor force of 164 slaves, only 130 of whom were "capable" (see p. 241 above). Walterstorff's remark that he had enough slaves and did not fear that their ranks would ever require replenishing was used to support the department's contention that the Danish islands had all the slaves they would ever need. Using Walterstorff's statement that 130 healthy slaves sufficed to work 300 acres planted in cane, the department wrote that, as St. Croix had between 27,000 and 28,000 acres of sugar cane, only 11,700 to 12,133 healthy slaves were needed. In 1802 the island had, according to the tax rolls, 11,713 healthy adult field slaves and 1,395 artisans, for a total of 13,108. There were also 2,615 adolescent slaves over ten years of age. Walterstorff was clearly mistaken when he said St. Croix needed 6,000 more slaves, the department concluded. As final proof, it pointed to the experience of the last slave ship to arrive at

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[81] Ibid., p. 22.

St. Croix before the abolition edict took effect. The ship had brought 388 slaves from the Gold Coast to St. Croix in February 1803, in the middle of the harvest, and had been able to sell only 138 of them. The rest had to be removed from St. Croix and sold elsewhere.[82]

The department used Schimmelmann's argument that if 6,000 more slaves were imported in 3 years at an average cost of 500 rigsdaler, nearly three million rigsdaler would be paid to foreign slave traders, as Danish slavers could supply only a small part of the total. This outflow of money, besides harming Denmark's balance of trade, involved a sum that the planters could not raise without another massive loan program funded by the Crown. A loan was not feasible. Furthermore, it would be difficult if not impossible to obtain 6,000 slaves in only three years, the time limit Schimmelmann, not Walterstorff, had placed on importing additional slaves. As a result, additional years would probably be needed and the abolition edict would never be implemented. The department agreed totally with the Committee on the Slave Trade that granting permission for a three-year extension of the slave trade would lead only to a similar demand from the planters to continue importing slaves after the original period had expired, until there was a permanent suspension of the edict. For the Crown to back away from an earlier command would encourage the planters to ignore the need to improve the treatment of their slaves and foster disrespect for royal authority.

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[82] Ibid., pp. 22-24.

The department therefore recommended that the Crown reject the appeal of the planters and keep the abolition edict in force.[83]

Regarding Schimmelmann's proposed colonial institute, the department cautioned that it was not necessary to bring in more slaves from Africa to work the plantations which were to comprise the institute. Importing slaves from Africa would also violate the abolition edict. Having just used Schimmelmann's criticism of Walterstorff's proposal, the department now used Walterstorff's argument against Schimmelmann's proposal to import slaves for the colonial institute. Such a large number of slaves, with all the "seasoning" difficulties their presence would entail, would be a burden on the institute. Furthermore, if slaves from the institute were hired out to planters as Schimmelmann proposed, those slaves would be given the heaviest and hardest tasks and would be badly overworked by the planters, whose interest would lie in preserving the health of their own slaves and exploiting those slaves employed as day laborers. The department warned against the threat to order posed by "a mass of raw, unwilling, mistreated and embittered slaves" created by such exploitation.[84] The department did not, however, reject the proposal that the Crown buy plantations and, by exemplary treatment of the slaves on them, produce a surplus of slaves who could be sold to planters in dire need of laborers. It sided with Schimmelmann's view that more land should be devoted to raising food

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[83] Ibid., pp. 25-29.

[84] Ibid., pp. 29-44.

for the slaves.

The proponents of abolition faced a difficult situation in the Council of State, for Walterstorff had persuaded Crown Prince Frederik to favor the planters' request for resuming the slave trade.[85] No one knows what happened in the Council of State, but a letter from Schimmelmann to the Duke of Augustenborg mentions that the slave trade was discussed for three hours. It is apparent that Schimmelmann used the arguments of Rosenstand-Goiske to counter the planters' assertion that they needed more slaves. Particularly important was the contradiction which Rosenstand-Goiske had shown between the large number of slaves listed as imported in the customs ledgers and the stagnant slave population revealed by the tax rolls. The doubts raised in the General Customs Department's Forestilling of May 15, 1804, concerning the actual number of slaves in the Danish islands permitted Schimmelmann to convince the Council of State that more data were needed before a decision could be reached. Only when such data had been obtained would the proposal to resume the slave trade be reconsidered.[86]

The resulting royal resolution of May 25, 1804, was the most important victory for the Danish abolitionists since the abolition edict itself. In a brief paragraph the Council of State declared:

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[85]Linvald, Kronprins Frederik og hans regering, p. 327. Christian Ditlev Reventlow noted this in his unpublished diary, entry for May 16, 1804.

[86]Bobé, Reventlowske Familiekreds, VII, 65-66. Letter from Ernst Schimmelmann to the Duke of Augustenborg, May 22, 1804. Schimmelmann wrote: La chambre des douanes avait insisté sur

> Before we make a decision regarding an appeal from some planters on St. Croix for permission to import slaves for an additional period, we want our General Customs Department to obtain, through our West Indian government, more detailed information and reliable data on the actual population of the slaves on our islands, which would put us in a position to judge the plea that more slaves are needed for the cultivation of sugar there. Investigation into the proposal to purchase plantations with public funds as well as the manner of administering such plantations . . . is postponed.[87]

By warding off approval of the planters' plea and successfully countering Walterstorff's arguments, the men who favored abolition had insured more than a year's delay before the matter could be reconsidered by the Council of State, as it would take at least that long to collect and send to Denmark the detailed population data needed before the Crown could reach a decision on the future of the slave trade. And consideration of Schimmelmann's proposal for a colonial institute had been deferred indefinitely.[88]

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l'abolition de l'importation des esclaves sans aucune restriction, elle a cru pouvoir appuyer son avis sur les tableaux fautifs du denombrement des negres, elle a cru pouvoir demontrer par les contradictions des registres, des douanes et du denombrement des negres africains, que le nombre effectif des negres excedoit de beaucoup celui des listes officielles. Le prince royal penché beaucoup pour la proposition de permettre l'importation pour 3 ans, mais en dernier résultat la resolution a été prise, que la suplique des planteurs dans laquelle on demande l'importation pour un terme limité, resteroit sans response.

[87]DSA, VGRGT, Om Negerhandelens Afskaffelse, Royal Resolution on the appeal of the St. Croix planters for permission to import slaves for three more years and on Schimmelmann's proposal for a colonial institute, Fredensborg Slot, May 25, 1804.

[88]This victory for abolition in Denmark corresponded with a revival of the abolitionist movement in England, where in 1804 the Abolition Committee met for the first time since 1797; and Wilberforce's abolition bill easily passed all three readings in the Commons in May and June 1804 before being killed by the insistence of the Lords on hearing evidence and by the lateness of the session. But now there was hope for eventual success; for one thing, the

That Schimmelmann himself was active in campaigning against the planters' appeal is shown by a letter written to him on November 29, 1829, by Georg Philip Schmidt, Schimmelmann's secretary from 1803-06. Schmidt referred to Schimmelmann's work on behalf of the slaves as "the most beautiful pearl in your life as a Minister of State [den skjønneste Perle i deres Ministerliv]." He added "I still remember vividly the struggle . . . to obtain victory for the good cause against the efforts of Walterstorff, Oxholm and other plantation owners, and I consider myself fortunate to have been able at that time at least to write copies of your excellency's calculations and statements [og jeg skatter mig lykkelig ved den Gang i det mindste at kunne afskrive Ds. Excellences Beregninger og Fremstillinger]."[89]

Yet Schimmelmann lacked Rosenstand-Goiske's dedication to abolition as a just cause to be pursued without regard for consequences. In his letter to the Duke of Augustenborg he stated that he had always regarded the slave trade as something that ought to be abolished or restricted (elle devait être abolie ou restreinte), a position in keeping with his proposed colonial institute's need for additional slaves from Africa who would be transported to the West Indies under government regulations designed to guarantee their

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despotic French government was moving toward support of the slave trade, and "support of abolition could almost bear the colour of patriotism." See Anstey, The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition, 1760-1810, pp. 343-44.

[89]Bobé, Reventlowske Familiekreds, V, 304. Letter from Georg Philip Schmidt to Ernst Schimmelmann, November 27, 1829.

well-being. It must have been with some reluctance that he had finally comprehended that the planters had not taken the abolition edict seriously and, as a result, had not yet changed their attitude toward their slaves. He recognized that nothing was more important than changing the viewpoint of the planters, for they generally regarded the slaves as agricultural instruments which one renewed when they were used up.[90]

The General Customs Department and the Committee on the Slave Trade used the reprieve provided by the royal resolution of May 25, 1804, to prolong the time it would take the colonial government to gather data on the slave population. On June 2 the department sent a letter to the committee, informing it of the results of the deliberations of the Council of State. The postponement of further consideration of Schimmelmann's plan for a colonial institute was not mentioned, however, and nothing more was heard of the plan. This undercuts Thorkild Hansen's assertion that if the British had not occupied the Danish West Indies in 1807, Schimmelmann's colonial institute would have been established on St. Croix.[91] The department asked the committee to suggest the kind of data needed from the colonial government and the format in which the data ought to be presented.[92]

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[90]Bobé, Reventlowske Familiekreds, VII, 66. Letter from Ernst Schimmelmann to the Duke of Augustenborg, May 22, 1804.

[91]See Hansen, Slavernes Øer, p. 279.

[92]DSA, VGRGT, Dokumenter vedkommende Kommissionen til Negerhandelens bedre Indretning og Ophaevelse, Letter from General Customs Department to Committee on the Slave Trade, pp. 1-2.

The committee replied to the department's letter four weeks later, requesting that the department ask the colonial government to provide a complete breakdown of the slave population according to age and to discard the broad categories previously used, such as boys, girls, and adolescents. The government should indicate births by sex and provide a list of deaths in the first year after birth. The number of slaves listed under "baptized" should be divided by congregation; in addition to listing married slaves, a new list should indicate those couples living together, as well as the number of births to married and unmarried couples in the previous year and whether the couples lived on the same plantation. An enumeration of the slave huts on each plantation would also be of value, for the committee could then determine the average number of persons in each hut.[93] The committee, in requesting such detailed population data, surely knew it was handing the colonial government a major task that would require much time and effort and, furthermore, would be subject to additional requests from Copenhagen for clarification, ensuring additional delays before the future of the slave trade was discussed once more in the Council of State.

In the meantime, the St. Croix planters, having heard nothing from Copenhagen, sent to the colonial government another appeal for an extension of the slave trade. The planters argued that the colonies could not survive without a yearly supply of slaves

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[93]DSA, VGRGT, Om Negerhandelens Afskaffelse, Letter from Committee on the Slave Trade to General Customs Department, June 29, 1804, pp. 1-3.

(Jord-Dykere). The slaves' mortality rate was consistently greater than their birth rate and, furthermore, the island had never had enough slaves for its proper cultivation. The planters were repeating the same arguments advanced in 1802: The Crown's intention of helping the planters obtain a sufficient number of slaves had been thwarted by unforeseen and unavoidable difficulties (Uhaeldigvis, bleve Hans Majestaets landsfaderlige Hensigter tilintetgiorde i de seenere Aaringer, ved uforudseete og uoverstigelige Forhindringer.) If the ban on importing slaves continued, the planters wrote, sugar cultivation, especially of the new and highly productive Otaheite cane, would diminish. The inevitable result would be a loss of revenue for the Crown and its subjects. The planters would not be able to pay the debts they owed European, including Danish, creditors. Blackmail was still, as in 1802, a weapon the planters relied on in trying to gain acceptance for their views, though this time a new loan for buying slaves was not mentioned. Surely, they wrote, "A monarch who placed his highest honor in promoting the welfare of his subjects [En Monark, som saetter sin højeste Aere i at fremme sine Undersaaters Velstand]" would not be indifferent to the desire of the island's inhabitants. Several more years at the very least were needed to import more slaves and thereby assure the continued prosperity of the colony.[94]

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[94]DSA, VGRGT, Om Negerhandelens Afskaffelse, Letter from St. Croix Burger Council to the government of the Danish West Indies, St. Croix, June 28, 1804, pp. 1-2.

The planters' use of the phrase "at the very least [i det mindste]" lends credence to the suspicion voiced by the Committee on the Slave Trade and the General Customs Department that a temporary extension would lead to abandonment of the abolition edict.

Accompanying the Burger Council's letter were seven letters, all in English, from planters on St. Croix, expressing their disappointment at the Crown's failure to respond to the appeal sent to Copenhagen in 1802. One planter, Joseph Blake, himself a member of the Burger Council, warned: "Our Cultivation has already suffered considerably from the want of Laborers; the Spirit of improvement which is so conspicuous in this Colony and the great industry which characterises its inhabitants have as yet been kept up by hope, but must soon yield to necessity if the difficulty which oppresses the one and extinguishes the other is not quickly removed."[95]

A letter from "The Proprietors in Company's Quarter" stated, regarding the Crown's goal of providing the islands with a sufficient number of slaves by January 1, 1803: "We sincerely lament that the Humane and beneficent Views of his Majesty have not answered the proposed Purpose; we shall not pretend to describe reasons for it, but we believe it to be owing in part to the introduction of the Otaheite Cane, which being much

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[95]Undated Letter from Joseph Blake, member of the St. Croix Burger Council, to the Burger Council, sent by the Burger Council to the colonial government along with the Burger Ccuncil's letter of June 28, 1804.

more productive requires more hands to cultivate it, particularly as we find it does not rattoon[96] as well as the Brasil Cane, and are obliged to renew it more frequently."[97] Letters from planters in Prince's Quarter, Westend Quarter, and Queens' Quarter also complained that cultivation of Otaheite cane required as many as 25 per cent more workers than Brazil or common cane; the Otaheite cane produced more sugar but had to be replaced every three or four years.[98]

Several themes ran through the planters' letters. One was that the colonies would be ruined without the slave trade; a limited three-year prolongation, as requested in 1802, was not mentioned, implying that the trade should continue indefinitely. The planters also warned that the Crown would suffer a loss of revenue if the islands' sugar production declined. They also argued, as had Walterstorff, that abolition would increase the slaves' workload, for planters would seek to maintain present production levels with a steadily diminishing labor force; indeed, the planters of Westend

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[96]A cane plant's ability to "rattoon" refers to its capacity for growing back each year without replanting.

[97]DSA, VGRGT, Om Negerhandelens Afskaffelse. Undated letter from planters in Company's Quarter to the St. Croix Burger Council, sent to the colonial government by the Burger Council on June 28, 1804. According to Deere, History of Sugar, I, 19-21, the Otaheite cane was a major advance in sugar production; it was first planted in the Caribbean on Martinique in the 1780s. Lowell J. Ragatz demonstrated that sugar production increased dramatically on Jamaica after the Otaheite cane was introduced there in the mid-1790s. See his Fall of the Planter Class in the British Caribbean, 1763-1833 (New York: Century Co., 1928), p. 90.

[98]Letters from planters of Prince's Quarter, May 15, 1804; Westend Quarter, March 7, 1804; and Queen's Quarter, April 26, 1804, to the St. Croix Burger Council.

and Queen's quarters blamed the excess of slave deaths over births on the shortage of workers, which necessitated overworking the present labor force.[99] That the planters could advance such an argument is evidence of their abiding interest in immediate production and their refusal to concern themselves with the welfare of their slaves. The planters probably hoped their appeal would receive a better response if they could convince the authorities in Copenhagen that continuing the slave trade would benefit the slaves in the Danish islands. They were advocating their own peculiar version of "humanitarian" reform.

The calamities referred to by the St. Croix planters in 1802 and again in 1804--the crop failure and epidemic--were exaggerated and served merely as an excuse for demanding access to the slave trade. The planters of Prince's Quarter did not even agree with those of Northside Quarter on when the "epidemic" occurred.[100] The planters' constant references to the harm caused to the slave trade by the British occupation of the Danish West Indies in 1801 are also misleading, as British slavers, according to Walterstorff (see p. 243 above), provided most of the slaves bought by local planters and would surely not have been deterred from continuing to sell slaves to the Danish colony after its takeover by their own country.

The colonial government in 1802 had shown sympathy for the

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[99]DSA, VGRGT, Om Negerhandelens Afskaffelse. Letters from planters of Westend Quarter, p. 1, and Queen's Quarter, p. 1.

[100]Letters from Planters of Prince's Quarter, p. 1, and Northside Quarter, p. 2.

planters' appeal in its cover letter accompanying Til Kongen! but had refrained from a direct endorsement of the need for more slaves. Now, however, Governor Mühlenfels sided with the planters, stating that, without the slave trade, the slave population would decline and sugar production would suffer. Mühlenfels added that the Crown also would lose money if the sugar islands lacked sufficient "working hands." He also agreed with the planters that the slaves working the islands needed the assistance of new African slaves in order to avoid being overworked. He blamed the islands' failure to acquire enough slaves on problems faced by the planters in 1800, 1801, and 1802, the suspension of the loans for buying slaves (Neger Laanets Ophaevelse), and the English occupation of the islands.[101]

The concern of the planters and the colonial government with obtaining permission to import slaves once more suggests that, though some smuggling of slaves into the islands was inevitable, only regular access to the Atlantic slave trade was considered sufficient to meet present needs and, what seems likely to have been the planters real fear, future needs. Without access to African slaves, the planters would have to devote more resources to caring for their present slaves, and as yet there seemed little likelihood of a self-perpetuating slave population on a Caribbean sugar island. The first colony to achieve such was Barbados, an old colony with

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[101]DSA, VGRGT, Vestindisk Journal, No. 1064, letter from government of Danish West Indies to the General Customs Department, July 12, 1804, pp. 1-3.

relatively few Africans in its slave population, and Barbados managed a surplus of births over deaths only after 1807.[102]

On July 5, 1804, the General Customs Department wrote Governor Mühlenfels, informing him of the Crown's decision to seek detailed and reliable data on the slave population of the Danish islands before reaching a decision on the planters' appeal for resuming the slave trade. Mühlenfels responded, on October 9, promising to collect the requested information as soon as possible.[103] He had already sent the planters' appeal of 1804 to Copenhagen.

As undoubtedly anticipated by the General Customs Department and the Committee on the Slave Trade, it took many months for Mühlenfels to gather the needed data on the slave population. The St. Croix slave census was completed by Mühlenfels on July 8, 1805, arrived in Copenhagen in the fall of 1805 and was sent by the General Customs Department to the Committee on the Slave Trade on November 26, 1805. Mühlenfels now sided more openly than before with the planters, as he concluded, after a discussion of the slave population and the number of births and deaths, that it would never be possible for St. Croix to obtain enough slaves to work the fields by relying solely on births. Slave women continued to induce abortions rather

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[102]Richard B. Sheridan, "Mortality and the Medical Treatment of Slaves in the British West Indies," in Race and Slavery in the Western Hemisphere, pp. 288-89.

[103]DSA, VGRGT, Om Negerhandelens Afskaffelse, Letter from General Customs Department to Governor Mühlenfels, July 5, 1804, p. 1, and Letter from Governor Mühlenfels to General Customs Department, October 9, 1804, p. 1.

than have children, even though some planters offered them small presents for each child they bore. Slavery, which was crucial for the survival of the Danish sugar islands, kept the fertility rate of slave women below what it should be. In order to maintain cultivation of the 24,283 acres now planted in sugar on St. Croix, Mühlenfels wrote, an additional 10,000 slaves were needed in order to avoid overworking the present labor force of 22,076 plantation slaves. Also, the proper ratio of male to female slaves had never been achieved. There were 11,601 men and 10,475 women; yet Mühlenfels argued there should be one-third more women than men. He ended his letter by recommending adoption of a slave code to protect slaves from brutal overseers, for "Protected by wise laws, the slaves in the colonies would be much better off than in their Father Land, where a despot could, for his own pleasure or the satisfaction of religious customs, have their heads chopped off." Even without such a protective black code, one would probably find in the Danish West Indies few slaves who would wish to return to Africa if given the opportunity.[104] This was the same man who had been described by Walterstorff as, if anything, open to criticism for being too solicitous of the slaves' welfare (see p. 243 above).

The census showed that in the two most densely populated and productive sections of St. Croix, Prince's Quarter and Queen's Quarter,

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[104]DSA, VGRGT, Om Negerhandelens Afskaffelse, Letter from Governor Mühlenfels to General Customs Department, St. Croix, July 8, 1805, pp. 1-4. In 1796, 27,655 acres had been planted in sugar; by 1804, only 24,283 were.

there were 205 births in the previous year and 317 deaths. For St. Croix as a whole, there were 547 births and 815 deaths.[105] Slave births on St. John numbered 58 in 1805, exceeding the 49 deaths. On St. Thomas there were 107 births and 129 deaths among the plantation slaves.[106] Thus the population of the plantation slaves, as opposed to house slaves and those in the towns, was declining on all three islands.

Despite the downward trend of the plantation slave population in the Danish islands, there was still an ample number of slaves in 1804-05. There were 2,417 plantation slaves on St. John where there were only 1,652 acres planted in cane, so there was surely no need for more slaves on that island. The plantation slaves numbered 3,344, and there were 2,458 acres planted in sugar cane. As on St. John, there was an ample supply of slaves.[107]

In his letter accompanying the population figures for St. Thomas and St. John, Mühlenfels argued more slaves were needed per acre on St. Thomas and St. John than on St. Croix because of the mountainous nature of the two smaller islands. The difficulty of working the land on those islands exhausted the slaves far more than did field labor on St. Croix, which had large areas of flat land. Mühlenfels noted that St. Thomas had 10,558 acres of unused land

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[105]Governor Mühlenfels' census of the St. Croix slave population, 1804-05.

[106]Governor Mühlenfels census of the St. John and St. Thomas slave populations in 1804-05.

[107]Ibid.

and St. John 8,655 and urged that the Crown provide the two islands with more slaves so that they could be fully cultivated. Yet on these old sugar islands, land not planted in sugar by the early nineteenth century was surely too steep to plant or too severely eroded to be productive. Mühlenfels said St. John needed another 1,000 slaves to plant additional acres in sugar cane. That island, according to Mühlenfels, was well suited to produce a regular excess of births over deaths. There were no towns on it in which the slaves could obtain rum in exchange for eggs and hay, and proceed to undermine their health by excessive drinking. On St. John at the end of the day a slave "went directly home from his work to rest, ate the food which his wife prepared while he smoked his pipe, and the two of them then lay down peacefully to sleep [og saa laegger de sig trygt til at sove]."[108] Mühlenfels had obviously succumbed to the planters' ideology.

The St. Croix census data reached Copenhagen in the fall of 1805 and were sent by the General Customs Department to the Committee on the Slave Trade on November 26. Eighteen months had elapsed since the royal resolution of May 25, 1804. The census of the slaves on St. Thomas and St. John arrived in the spring of 1806 and was sent to the committee on March 18. The victory won by Rosenstand-Goiske and Schimmelmann in May 1804 had thus provided a delay of nearly two

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[108]DSA, VGRGT, Om Negerhandelens Afskaffelse, Letter from Governor Mühlenfels to General Customs Department, St. Croix, September 5, 1805, pp. 1-4.

years before reopening the slave trade could again be considered by the Crown.

In the meantime, Rosenstand-Goiske and Oxholm debated abolition in the press, with Rosenstand-Goiske publishing a forty-one page article in Minerva in February 1805. He sought to soothe those who had hoped the slaves would be freed by the Crown, noting that abolition was not the same as emancipation and adding that the government could not free the slaves in the immediate future, for the slaves would first have to be prepared for freedom by "improved education and increased morality." Without such careful preparation, emancipation would be unwise, harmful to both the slaves and their masters. Rosenstand-Goiske was adopting the same stand toward emancipation as the Committee on the Slave Trade had in its report of December 28, 1791. He wrote that the Danish government preferred to move slowly and carefully toward emancipation, and the abolition edict had been a step in the right direction; the edict had also ended Denmark's role in the forced transport of Africans from their homeland. Another advantage of ending the slave trade was a reduction in the death rate of Danish sailors, as the "unhealthy" journey on the slave ships from the Gold Coast to the Caribbean claimed the lives of many sailors.[109]

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[109]Rosenstand-Goiske, "Om Negerhandelens Ophaevelse i Hensyn til de danske vestindiske Øer," Minerva, February 1805, pp. 190-193. This reference to a higher-than-average death rate among Danish sailors on slave ships may have been inspired by Clarkson's computation of losses on English slave ships.

Oxholm's response to Rosenstand-Goiske's defense of the abolition edict came more than a year later. He agreed that the slave trade was immoral, but argued that Rosenstand-Goiske was mistaken in believing that sugar production could be maintained after abolition of the slave trade. He added that so long as the sale of slaves was permitted within the Danish islands, abolition of the trade in slaves from Africa and outside the islands would have little effect on slave treatment. Oxholm said it was nonsense to believe that a human being who was subject to sale cared where he was sold. He thereby ignored a basic tenet of the abolitionists: that when new slaves from outside the Danish West Indies were no longer available, the planters would place a higher value on their present slaves and, accordingly, treat them better. Oxholm, as Walterstorff in 1804, argued that the Danish slave trade was too insignificant to affect the well-being of Africans on the Gold Coast. And after providing the standard excuses for the planters' failure to buy more slaves in 1800-02, Oxholm failed to mention that African slaves had been legally available for sale on St. Croix in 1803 and that only 138 slaves out of 388 had been bought by St. Croix planters. (See p. 258 above.) Oxholm concluded by urging a reopening of the Danish slave trade for at least three years or, better yet, for as long as it might take to increase the plantation slave population of St. Croix to 30,000.[110] This would require importing another 8,000

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[110]Oxholm, "Nogle Anmaerkninger over en Afhandling om Negerhandelens Ophaevelse udi Maanedskriftet Minerva af Februarii 1805, Ny Minerva, May 1806, pp. 129-131, pp. 146-47 and pp. 159-60.

slaves at least and, with a continued excess of deaths over births, would involve the indefinite continuation of the slave trade.

Rosenstand-Goiske's reply to Oxholm was published two months later in Ny Minerva. He argued that the planters had exaggerated their need for slaves in 1792 in order to get the Crown to loan them as much money as possible, and he sought to refute Oxholm's article page by page. In response to Oxholm's statement that the slave trade from Africa to America was no more evil than the continued sale of slaves within the Danish islands, Rosenstand-Goiske wrote that surely Oxholm "cannot seriously mean that it is not a greater burden on a slave to be transported several thousand miles away from his homeland in an enclosed, unhealthy, foul room, uncertain of his fate and under agonizing fear for his future, than to be sold by one master to another in the same place?" He added: "Is there not an enormous difference for a peasant, . . . when he is sold for a hunting dog, whether he remains in his own country or is sent, for example, to Siberia?" Regarding Oxholm's contention that discontinuing the Danish slave trade would not really help Africa, as the Danish islands normally required only 1,000 slaves a year, Rosenstand-Goiske commented that the fact remained that 1,000 fewer slaves would be taken from Africa for sale in the Caribbean:

> Is the fate of 1,000 persons so unimportant? One should not forget that the question here is not what is best for the slave traders but rather what is best for mankind [Er 1000 Menneskers Skiaebne saa ligegyldig? Man glemme dog ei, at her er ei Spørgsmaalet om Fordelen for Menneskehandlere, men for Menneskene].[111]

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[111]Rosenstand-Goiske, "Noget mere om Negerhandelen i Anledning af Hr. Generalmajor Oxholms Anmarkninger," Ny Minerva,

Rosenstand-Goiske said the Danish islands, even if the slave trade were permitted, would never acquire the number of plantation slaves which Oxholm believed they required, for the islands simply did not need that many slaves. To allow the slave trade to continue until 32,000 plantation slaves were present on St. Croix (Oxholm had said 30,000, not 32,000, were needed) would in effect guarantee that Denmark, which had provided the first example of a European nation ending its slave trade, would become the last nation where abolition actually occurred (og altsaa Danmark, som gav det første Exempel paa at ophaeve Handelen, skulde blive det sidste, hvor det virkeligen skete.)[112]

While Oxholm and Rosenstand-Goiske engaged in their debate, the Committee on the Slave Trade stalled further action by the Crown by making a careful study of the census data sent to Copenhagen by Mühlenfels. The St. Croix Burger Council tried once more to get a response to its petition for a resumption of the slave trade.[113] The General Customs Department told Crown Prince Frederik on November 3, 1806, that it was awaiting suggestions from the committee

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July 1806, p. 23, and pp. 28-29. That he was carefully following the progress of abolition in England, as Schimmelmann surely was, seems apparent from Rosenstand-Goiske's comment on p. 3 that Lord Grenville had been quoted in the British press as noting that Denmark had already ended its slave trade.

[112] Ibid., p. 39.

[113] DSA, VGRGT, Vestindisk Journal, No. 840, 1806, Letter from Burger Council to General Customs Department, St. Croix, July 10, 1806, p. 1.

before presenting its report on the future of the slave trade.[114]

The Crown Prince was constantly distracted by the threat of invasion and, beginning in 1803, he established headquarters near the southern border at the head of an army corps that eventually grew to 20,000. His control over the government in Copenhagen declined during his absence.[115] It was therefore difficult for him to actively push for measures he favored, such as resumption of the slave trade, so long as the threat of attack from abroad persisted.

The General Customs Department and the Committee on the Slave Trade took advantage of Frederik's preoccupation with foreign policy and his absence from Copenhagen. They obstructed the wishes of the planters and of the Crown Prince by delaying further action on the slave trade. As Schimmelmann and Rosenstand-Goiske observed the progress of the British abolitionists, they were surely encouraged to hope that British endorsement of abolition would ensure the survival of Danish abolition.

As Britain had acquired foreign colonies during her conflict with France and the latter's allies, the threat of overproduction became obvious. Such underdeveloped colonies as Trinidad and Dutch Guiana, if sufficiently supplied with slaves, might produce enough sugar to glut the market and, consequently, force down the price of

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[114]DSA, VGRGT, Vestindisk Kopibog, Letter from General Customs Department to Crown Prince Frederik, November 3, 1806, p. 1.

[115]Holm, Danmark-Norges Historie, VII, Part 1, pp. 119-20, 161-62.

sugar produced by the old British sugar islands. An initial step toward coping with the problem of overproduction was taken in 1802, when the British government decided against a massive sale of Crown land on Trinidad, thereby eliminating a potentially enormous market for the slave trade.[116] An Order-in-Council of August 15, 1805, banned the slave trade to captured colonies. In 1806 Parliament outlawed the sale of slaves to foreign colonies as well as captured territories, ending more than half of the British slave trade. The remainder of the British slave trade was abolished by a law signed on March 25, 1807.[117]

Denmark's traditional, and profitable, policy of neutrality was subjected to increasing pressure in 1807. After a British force attacked Copenhagen in August and seized the Danish fleet there, Crown Prince Frederik allied his country with France. Danish overseas territories, including the West Indian islands, were occupied by Britain. Denmark's future role in the Atlantic slave trade had been decided permanently. The British occupation of the Danish West Indies ended only in April 1815 when Major General Peter Lotharius Oxholm, the new Danish governor, resumed control of the islands for Denmark.[118]

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[116]Patrick C. Lipscomb, "Party Politics, 1801-1802: George Canning and the Trinidad Question," The Historical Journal, XII (1969), 446-47, 462-63.

[117]See David Brion Davis, The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), pp. 443-49, and Anstey, The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition, pp. 395-402.

[118]Vibaek, Dansk Vestindien, pp. 230-36.

CHAPTER VII

Conclusion

Three considerations influenced Ernst Schimmelmann in 1791 when he began his inquiry into the feasibility of abolishing the Danish Atlantic slave trade. First, he was keenly aware of the unprofitability of the slave trade. Second, he was carefully following the progress of the British abolitionists and feared that abolition by Britain, and perhaps France, would endanger the future supply of slaves to the Danish West Indies. Third, he was personally opposed to the slave trade as an immoral enterprise.

The slave trade was always a risky venture, and the various Danish companies involved in the trade during the eighteenth century normally staved off bankruptcy by relying on government largesse and on wars between other European colonial powers. But the government tired of the burden, and wars did not last forever. The committee Schimmelmann created in 1786 to study the Guinea trade concluded that nothing but further losses could be anticipated. There was obviously no future for any Danish slave-trading company. This was the main "economic" motive for abolishing the Danish slave trade. But this

desire to avoid further losses from participation in the slave trade does not suffice to account for abolition; the earlier failures of Danish slave-trading companies had not given rise to a move to end Danish participation in the trade. Also, the Danish government, in supporting abolition in 1791-92, could merely have ended active Danish participation in the trade, sold the Guinea forts, and relied on foreign slavers to supply the Danish West Indies. This would have been welcomed in the colonies, where Danish monopoly slave-trading companies were traditionally regarded with suspicion and even hatred.

A secondary economic influence on Schimmelmann's thinking in 1791 was his realization that slaves born in the sugar islands were more cooperative and dependable than those brought from Africa. He criticized the West Indian planters in a letter of June 18, 1791, for failing to realize that their own benefit lay in creating a stable, self-perpetuating labor force rather than continuing to depend on the slave trade. The abolition edict was in part an attempt by the Crown to encourage the planters to adopt a more reasonable approach to the long-range needs of the colonial economy. Schimmelmann's preference for creole slaves was also based on evidence that they were less inclined than African slaves to revolt.

Schimmelmann's Bedenken showed that he believed the British abolitionists would soon put an end to their country's slave trade. He thought the abolitionists' failure in 1791 had resulted from

their insistence on immediate abolition. Perhaps other slave-trading nations, such as France, would join Britain in outlawing the slave trade. If they did, Denmark would face strong pressure to abolish its slave trade on dangerously short notice, and the Danish sugar islands might suffer a serious shortage of laborers. Schimmelmann felt the risk of untimely pressure from foreign powers could be reduced if Denmark soon announced its intention to abolish the slave trade to its colonies. But a period of preparation was needed to assure a smooth transition and to minimize any problems for sugar production after the trade ended.

There can be no doubt that Schimmelmann despised the slave trade. He devoted five pages of his twenty-page Bedenken to criticism of the trade, pointing out not only the horrors it inflicted on the slaves during the Middle Passage but emphasizing its evil impact on African society as well. The report of the Committee on the Slave Trade--a committee Schimmelmann called into being and dominated--amplified his attack on the slave trade as inhumane and said the trade was virtually indistinguishable from murder. The committee placed greatest emphasis on attacking the trade as immoral and uncivilized. If abolition could be accomplished without harming the economy of the islands, it was the duty of the Crown to end the trade. Schimmelmann and the committee managed to convince themselves that abolition would not be harmful. They were taking a "leap in the dark," however, as no sugar island had ever

achieved a balance of slave births and deaths.[1]

By setting a date for abolition, Schimmelmann hoped that the planters could be induced to adopt a policy of amelioration to protect their own self-interest. But amelioration failed, for the planters did not take the abolition edict seriously and continued to concentrate on short-term profits. Reforms to benefit the slaves were never enforced because the colonial government advised against any tampering with the property rights of the slaveholders. The Crown, fearful of antagonizing the planters, accepted this advice.

The abolition edict had been predicated on the assumption that Britain would soon adopt abolition and that the Danish islands would, by 1803, have succeeded in balancing slave births and deaths. Neither of these assumptions had proved true when the date came for ending the slave trade to the Danish West Indies. The St. Croix planters appealed for an extension of time for the slave trade, and Walterstorff convinced Crown Prince Frederik to favor their point of view. Schimmelmann, however, refused to abandon his earlier stand

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[1]As pointed out earlier, the abolition edict and the version of the committee's report published in Minerva endeavored to avoid inflammatory statements regarding the immorality of the slave trade so as not to raise unnecessary opposition to abolition. Carol Gold, because she read only the edict and Kirstein's summary of the report in Minerva, recently concluded that the Danish edict was motivated primarily by economic considerations. See Carol Gold, "The Danish Reform Era, 1784-1800 " (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1975), p. 182. A reading of Schimmelmann's Bedenken and the full unprinted report of the committee, however, reveals the presence of a powerful humanitarian influence.

in support of abolition. In opposing an extension of the slave trade, Schimmelmann was guided by his long-standing belief that the trade was immoral. His own plantations suffered a decline in their slave population from September 1800 to 1804.[2] Abolition clearly meant that his plantations might continue to lose slaves. As his great wealth was derived primarily from the productive capacity of his slave labor-force, it is apparent that the humanitarian aspect of abolition was of primary significance for him in 1804. Yet Schimmelmann was surely aware that his plantations would probably enjoy an advantage over others in adjusting to abolition.

Schimmelmann was joined by Rosenstand-Goiske of the General Customs Department in warding off the planters' appeal. Rosenstand-Goiske, unlike Schimmelmann, was motivated exclusively by humanitarian considerations. He lacked Schimmelmann's gentlemanly tolerance for the views of others and was prepared to wage a single-minded, uncompromising struggle to protect the abolition edict. He, not Schimmelmann, pointed out the flaws in the slave-population data provided by the colonial government and forcefully attacked Walterstorff's arguments for resuming the slave trade. Rosenstand-Goiske was more effective than Schimmelmann as a defender of the abolition edict in 1804. He shares credit with Schimmelmann for

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[2]DSA, Ernst Schimmelmanns Privat Arkiv, Pk. 73a, Fideikommisset vedkommende Papirer, 1801-1815. In September 1800 the four Schimmelmann plantations had 948 slaves; in September 1801 they had 932; in September 1804, 913. From September 1801 to September 1802, fourteen slaves were born on the St. Croix plantations and twenty-six died.

compelling the Danish Crown to enforce the edict. Because of their efforts, Denmark remained the first European slave-trading power to outlaw participation by its subjects in the slave trade. The example provided by Denmark did not pass unnoticed in Britain, where the most important struggle against the Atlantic slave trade was being waged.

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APPENDIX I

Slave Code for the Danish West Indies, prepared by Governor Philip Gardelin, September 5, 1733

1. The ringleaders of runaway slaves shall be pinched three times with red-hot iron and thereafter hanged.
2. Slaves involved in a conspiracy shall lose a leg, unless the owners wish to lower the sentence to 150 lashes and the loss of an ear.
3. Participants in a conspiracy, who do not reveal the conspiracy to a white, shall be branded on the forehead and given 100 lashes.
4. A slave who provides information about a slave conspiracy shall receive ten piasters for every slave found guilty, and his name shall be kept secret.
5. A runaway slave who has been gone eight days shall be punished with 150 lashes, one who has been gone twelve weeks shall lose a leg, and one who has been gone six months shall be executed, unless his master wishes to lower the punishment to the loss of a leg.
6. A black who has stolen something worth four <u>rigsdaler</u> shall be pinched [with red-hot iron] and then hanged. Small thefts shall be punished by a branding on the forehead and 100 to 150 lashes.

7. Slaves who receive stolen goods . . . shall be branded and receive 150 lashes.
8. Those who conceal runaway slaves [Maroon-Negre] shall receive the same punishment.
9. A black who in anger raises his hand against a white or threatens a white or speaks harshly to a white [giver ham knubbede Ord], shall . . . be punched three times [with red-hot iron] and then hanged, if the white demands it; if not, the black shall lose a hand.
10. The word of an honorable [retskaffen] white shall suffice against a black, and if there should be unsolved questions [Formodninger] in the case, the black can be tortured.
11. A black who meets a white on the road shall step to the side and stand still until the white has passed him by, under punishment of a beating [Lusing] by the white.
12. No slave may be seen in town with a club [Stok] or a knife, nor may the slaves fight among themselves with clubs or knives, without receiving fifty lashes.
13. Witchcraft practiced by the blacks shall be punished by a heavy beating.
14. A black who is convicted of having intended to poison someone shall be pinched three times with red-hot iron, and thereafter broken on the wheel and placed while still alive on a raised platform.
15. A free Negro who receives stolen goods from a runaway [Maroon] or a thief or other harmful black, shall lose his freedom, his

possessions, and after a lashing be deported.

16. Dancing, celebrations, gambling and the like by the blacks shall be strictly forbidden, unless such activities occur with the permission of the master or overseer and in the presence of the latter.

17. No black may sell supplies for cattle or anything else without a permission card from his master.

18. Plantation slaves may not stay in town after taps [Tappenstreg], under punishment of being brought into the fort and given a beating.

19. The prosecutor shall strictly maintain observance of these articles, in accordance with which free Negroes and slaves shall be judged in court, and this manifesto shall be publicized three times a year with a beating of the drums.[1]

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[1] Høst, Efterretninger om Øen Sanct Thomas, pp. 85-88.

APPENDIX II

Paul Erdmann Isert's account of the slave revolt on the Danish slave ship "Christiansborg," October 8, 1786, and the journey to St. Croix, concluding with the sale of the slaves.

Isert described the fears that gripped the slaves as they were loaded onto the ship:

> In their homelands such a multitude of frightful tales are told about the way slaves are used in America that, if they had heard them, they were terrified. A slave once asked me, in full seriousness, if the shoes that I wore were not made of the skin of Negroes [Neger-Leder]. For he had noticed that my shoes were of the same color as his skin. Others say that we eat the slaves and make gunpowder out of their bones.[1] They can not imagine that they will only be used in agricultural and other occupations, since in their homeland so few hands and so little time are needed for the work of sustaining life that it would be quite

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[1] The belief that Europeans intended to eat their black slaves was widespread in Africa. See Mungo Park, Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa: performed under the Direction and Patronage of the African Association, in the Years 1795, 1796, and 1797 (New York, 1813), pp. 231-32, cited in Elizabeth Donnan, Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America, Vol. II, The Eighteenth Century (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1931), pp. 634-35. Park traveled with a slave caravan from the interior down to the Coast. He noted the slaves' fear that Europeans were cannibals. The slaves refused to believe Park when he told them that in America they would be used as agricultural workers; their belief "that the whites purchase Negroes for the purpose of devouring them, or of selling them to others that they may be devoured hereafter" made necessary a careful watch over the slaves during the journey to keep them from escaping. Oldendorp wrote that African-born slaves in the Danish West Indies had told him of their initial fear that they were to be eaten by white cannibals in America. See his Geschichte der Mission der evangelischen Brüder, I, p. 361.

unnecessary [überflüssig] for them to import foreigners.[2]

. . . . . .

Now a word about an insurrection [Überlaufe] of the slaves on the ship on which I sailed. In the middle of the deck a slave ship is equipped with a high, strong, wodden barrier [Scheidewand] which is called the quarter-deck [Schanze], the side of which facing the forward part of the ship is extremely smooth and must be without any open grooves so that the slaves can not get a grip in it with their fingers. On top of this barrier there are placed as many small cannon and muskets as there is room for; these guns are always loaded and are fired every evening to keep the slaves fearful. There are always guards by the guns; the guards must keep a close watch on the movements of the slaves. Astern [im hintertheile] . . . of the quarter-deck are all of the women and children, and outside in front of the quarter-deck are the men, who can neither see nor get together with the women. The men are always chained together in pairs, hand and foot. Moreover, through the rows, as they sit on the deck, heavy chains are drawn across their feet, so that they cannot stand without permission; furthermore they must not move from that place except in the morning when they are allowed up on the deck and in the evenings when they go back down below deck. However, because their number is so great, they can enjoy this motion only every other day; on alternate days they must remain below, where they are packed together like herring.

It was on the second day of our journey, . . . that the insurrection broke out. I was at the time alone among the slaves, joking [scherzte] with some of those from the most civilized tribes whose own language I understood. Since among such a crowd there is always considerable confusion, I was made aware that something was amiss when suddenly a great stillness began. Because at that time the greater part of the crew were eating, I wanted to go towards the bow in order to see whether everyone there was at his post, in case the slaves were thinking of staging an insurrection. As I reached approximately the middle of the ship, the door of the quarter-deck opened and the first mate started to come toward me. But at that moment a cry rang out from all the men that was the most horrible sound imaginable, which nevertheless bore a resemblance to a cry which I had heard previously during an attack in battle. With this cry every man rose who previously, as usual, had been sitting. Some of them struck me on the head with the manacles with which they were chained together, so that I immediately fell to the deck. Since they were also bound together by their feet, I was able to crawl away from them and reach the quarter-deck door. But here I knocked this time in vain. Then when the crew wanted to let me

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[2]Isert, Reise nach Guinea und den Carabaischen Inseln, p. 306-07.

in, such a mass of slaves grasped the door that it was very difficult for the crew to close it again. And it is the agreed policy preferably to let some Europeans be killed rather than allow the slaves to take control of the door, for once they did they could reach the rear of the ship where all of our weapons were located, and then it would be simple for them to become masters of the ship. In the meantime they did not let me remain idly by the door for long, but rather soon made me as before hit the deck [den Boden suchen]. However, as the crew at the rear of the ship learned what was happening outside, they sought to keep the quarter-deck clear by using bayonets from above. So, in order to get me into a better place in which to kill me, the slaves pulled me by my feet to the front of the ship, where one of them who had grabbed a shearing knife [Scheermesse] from the slave who was shaving him when the rebellion began, slashed me across my forehead, cutting the temporal artery and my ear, and stabbing deeply into my throat. But because I wore a thick silk kerchief, he remained occupied with my throat and could not accomplish his purpose at once, and a bullet from the quarter-deck came to my rescue, passing through the slave's chest, at which he fell back and the other slave who held me let go, by which means I once more became free. The crew fired still more assorted shots in addition to two three-pound cannon which were loaded with peas. At this the slaves as quickly as possible retreated towards the bow of the ship in order to escape the shots. In this way thus the quarter-deck door was cleared, and as I was still strong enough I crawled over there, with a stream of blood marking my progress, for my right temporal artery had been cut. The first mate had also received various wounds, though they were not as serious as mine, and because he was a better seaman than I, he saved himself by means of going overboard through a cannon hatch and climbing back up on the other side of the quarter-deck. In the meantime the slaves had already in varying degrees hammered off their manacles, when the crew made a sortie from the quarter-deck in order to take the slaves, either by conciliatory [Güte] or forceful means back down into their chambers. And when the crew did this, supported by their guns, a number of slaves who had not been included in the conspiracy went down to their chamber without any more ado. But the others, when they saw that they could accomplish nothing, all jumped overboard into the sea. Some boys from the same tribe who lacked the heart for this rash step were intentionally pushed overboard by their parents. The crew made sure of the slaves below deck, launched as quickly as possible the small boats, and took custody once again of as many slaves as possible, some still alive, others dead. It was astonishing how several of the pairs of slaves, although they had only a hand and a foot free (they were chained together with the other hand and foot) nevertheless were able with great skill to keep themselves above the water. Some were obstinate in the face of death itself and definatly threw away the ropes which had been thrown down around them from the ship in order to pull them out,

and then they sank forcefully. Among the others was a pair which could not agree: one demanded to be saved, but the other wanted to die; therefore the one who desired to drown pulled the other forcibly with him under water as the latter screamed pitifully. The latter slave was saved, though his comrade had already surrendered up his spirit [Geist].

The chaos lasted for two hours before it was entirely quelled. After a count we found that we had lost thirty-four slaves during the insurrection, all of whom had drowned; whereas of the Europeans, there were none killed, though two . . . were wounded.

As for me, I found myself in very awkward condition. For by that time I had lost so much blood that my strength swiftly declined to the point where I could not even bind my wound, but rather merely put a few handkerchiefs around my head in order as much as possible to stop the bleeding . . . .

Isert passed out but was well tended to and had fully recovered by the time the "Christiansborg" reached St. Croix two months later.

In that I could not have caused the slaves to suffer much in those two days at sea prior to the rising, you may well ask why they were so incensed against me from the start of the insurrection. I learned later that they had believed that, because I was the last to board the ship, I was the owner of all the slaves, and that it would be best to send me to the next world first, for then the rest of the Europeans, as hirelings, would surrender quicker . . . .

One of the ring leaders of the conspiracy was a slave who had already been in the West Indies and in England and who, I do not know how, had returned to the Gold Coast, where he found a place in our service as a boatsman. On the coast he had gone so deeply into debt that, merely in order to get rid of him, he was sent to the West Indies on our ship. This villain [Bösewicht] had persuaded the slaves that they simply ought to beat the whites to death; then he would soon bring the ship back to land, even if they were still far out at sea. He told them moreover many things both true and false about the West Indies; for example, that it was a land of misery [Plage], where they would have little to eat but would be worked hard and beaten. He was in fact a dangerous person . . . .

Except for this unhappy uprising, we would have made a very profitable [vortheilhafte] journey, as only seven slaves died on the way to St. Croix, which for such a crowd of people in such a situation is a very small number. There are instances where slave ships have brought to the West Indies no more than half the slaves which they purchased in Africa . . . . On the "Christiansborg" the greatest cleanliness was observed, and the slaves had to go up onto the deck every other day and move about

as much as space permitted. By means of ventilators . . . the slaves were provided with as much fresh air below deck as possible. In the evening, before they were allowed back down in their quarters, all the chambers were well fumigated with dampened gun powder [räucherte man alle Kammern mit angefeuchteten Schiesspulver wol aus]. The slaves' food consisted for the most part of products from their native land, such as maize, wild rice, and yams . . . .

. . . . . .

A few days after our arrival at St. Croix the fate [Schicksal] of our slaves was decided. They had been brought ashore, cleaned [ausputzen] in the best manner possible according to the way of their homeland, permitted all kinds of liberties, . . . so that they were persuaded that they had arrived in a paradise. But appearances deceived. The day of their sale arrived. They were placed in rows and ranks . . . . The door was opened: an army of buyers rushed in, and scrambled away, like maniacs, with those male and female slaves whom they had noticed in previous days, when the slaves had been on display, and brought them before a seller in order to agree on a price. The whole thing occurred in such a fury, that I myself soon became frightened . . . . After four hours most of the slaves had been purchased. The remaining forty-eight slaves consisted mostly of frail [Gebrechlichen] or aged Negroes, who were sold the next day through the bank for 200 thaler each. The sum price for all the slaves sold amounted to more than 97,000 thaler.[3]

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[3]Isert, Reise nach Guinea und den Carabaischen Inseln, pp. 309-20.

APPENDIX III

Slaves purchased in Africa by Danes, 1778-1789

Year	Number of Slaves
1778	1,197
1779	1,021
1780	475
1781	2,508
1782	1,831
1783	1,999
1784	2,428
1785	2,087
1786	1,227
1787	993
1788	633
1789	714
	17,113[1]

Number of ships used in the slave trade, 1778-1789

Year	Ships	Year	Ships
1778	3	1785	8
1779	2	1786	3
1780	1	1787	4
1781	5	1788	2
1782	5	1789	2
1783	7	1790	1
1784	8	1791	1[2]

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[1] "Udtog af Forestillingen til Kongen angaaende Negerhandelens Afskaffelse," Minerva, April 1792, p. 53.

[2] Ibid., p. 54.

APPENDIX IV

Slave deaths on Danish ships sailing
to St. Croix and on St. Croix prior to sale, 1778-87

Name of Ship	Name of Captain	Number of Slaves bought in Africa	Slave Deaths			Slaves sold on St. Croix	Slaves sent on for sale elsewhere
			On journey to St. Croix	On St. Croix prior to sale	Total deaths		
Christiansborg	Westmarker	304	27	16	43	261	
Fredensborg	Terents	421	102	41	143	276	
Rio Volta	Hammer	472	77	24	101	371	
Acra	Asenius	440	10	3	13	427	
Christiansborg	Hiorth	576	10	13	23	379	173
Ningo	West Bohn	476	22	16	38	438	
Rio Volta	Hammer	469	71	7	78	391	
Acra	Møller	592	230	27	257	155	180
Christiansborg	Hiorth	457	120	5	125	132	199
Fredensborg	Terents	540	26	4	30	510	
Gehejmeraad Guldberg	Beck	250	102	1	103	147	
Gehejmeraad Stampe	Holm	331	41	1	42	289	
Greve Schimmelmann	Boldt	---	--	2	2	296	
Uppernavik	Walløe	201	5	3	8	193	
Greve Bernstorff	Schrøder	---	--	2	2	115	
Christiansborg	Berg	457	49	2	51	406	
Ada	Higgins	120	1	0	1	119	
	Total	6,106	893	167	1,060	4,905	552

SOURCE: Government of Danish West Indies, Report on Slave Trade, October 15, 1787.

APPENDIX V

Lists of slaves from Africa sold on St. Croix, 1778-1787

Name of Ship	Name of Captain	Date of Arrival	Number of slaves brought to St. Croix						Amount of sale in rigsdaler
			Men	Women	Boys	Girls	Babies	Total	
Christiansborg	Niels Westmarker	May 24, 1778	121	70	43	27	2	261	53,311
Fredensborg	Johann Terents	Feb. 10, 1779	155	74	31	16	3	276	56,248
Rio Volta	Andreas Hammer	March 18, 1779	206	109	41	15	4	371	81,759
Acra	Erich Asenius	May 22, 1779	244	77	72	34	4	427	89,789
Christiansborg	Jørgen Hiorth	Dec. 6, 1779	292	135	69	56	3	552	112,601
Ningo	Niels West Bohn	Aug. 29, 1780	196	72	112	58	3	438	92,540
Rio Volta	Andreas Hammer	June 2, 1781	169	68	95	59		391	86,400
Acra	S. A. Møller	Aug. 30, 1781	48	39	25	43		155	25,870
Christiansborg	Jørgen Hiorth	Oct. 12,1781	18	30	52	43	6	143	28,592
Fredensborg	Johann Terents	Nov. 16,1781	269	130	55	56	11	510	121,286
Geheimeraad Guldberg	Niels Beck	Feb. 29, 1784	64	44	21	18	2	147	33,155
Geheimeraad Stampe	Holm	June 1, 1784	125	61	71	32		289	59,472
Greve Schimmelmann	Rasmus Boldt	Nov. 27, 1784	106	70	82	38		296	61,302
Uppernavik	Walløe	March 9, 1785	67	75	29	22	1	193	38,893
Greve Bernstorff	Schrøder	Jan. 11, 1786	51	37	21	6		115	24,410
Christiansborg	Berg	Dec. 18,1786	160	96	86	64	6	406	97,440
Ada	Isaac Higgens	June 28, 1787	51	27	22	19	4	119	27,061
		Total	2,342	1,214	927	606	49	5,089[b]	1,090,132[a]

[a]Because of some rounding off, the sums from each sale add up to a few rigsdaler less than this total.

[b]Total does not include babies.

SOURCE: Government of Danish West Indies, Report on Slave Trade, October 15, 1787.

APPENDIX VI

Excerpts from the report by the government of the Danish West Indies to the General Customs Department on the condition of the Danish slave trade with suggestions as to ways in which the slave trade might be improved, October 15, 1787.

> Because the investigations made with regard to the slave trade indicated that the excessively low prices which are paid for slaves in the Danish West Indian islands in comparison with prices paid for slaves in the colonies of other nations have had not a small influence in making the slave trade unprofitable, we believe that the following circumstance is well deserving of attention: that most of the Guinea Company's [Baltic-Guinea Company] expeditions took place in war time, when the French islands had virtually no supply of slaves, except for what the Danish Guinea Company or Portuguese ships could supply them, which meant that prices for slaves had to be higher in the French colonies, where there were more buyers.[1]
>
> In calculating the outcome of each individual expedition, it is possible that the profits of the return cargo have been included, and this naturally must have favored the sales made on the French islands. Indeed, with regard to the cargo, a noticeable difference results depending on whether a ship is loaded with brown sugar or with partly refined [daekkede] sugar, coffee, and indigo.[2] The majority of the slaves who have been brought to St. Croix come from Fort Christiansborg. The ships have had a trip of three or four months' duration, with considerable illness and fatalities among the slaves. Also,

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[1]The Baltic-Guinea Company was created only in 1781; from 1777 until 1781 there was no "Guinea" company, though Danish merchants enjoyed a monopoly on the slave trade to the Danish West Indies in those years.

[2]Unlike the French islands, the Danish West Indies produced only brown sugar. For production of semi-refined or clayed sugar on the French islands, see Deerr, History of Sugar, I, pp. 232ff.

because of slave risings [overløb], especially on the ships "Christiansborg" and "Acra" in 1781 and on the former also this past year, a considerable number of slaves have been lost. On the other hand the ships destined for the French colonies sailed for the most part from Upper Guinea [Ovenkysten] which involves a trip of six to eight weeks; the slaves on these ships are healthier because of the shorter journey, and they haven't been locked up in a crowded fort, often without a roof, in rain and filth; this is especially the case at Fort Fredensborg.

But however much lower the price in the Danish colonies might have been than in the French colonies, we are still convinced that the company might have profited from the cargoes of slaves sold here on St. Croix, if the Company had always supplied its forts, lodges, and ships with enough merchandise of the right kind and of dependable quality; if it had used suitable ships . . . for the slave trade, and if the ships were economically and quickly fitted out; if the Company's captains had imposed neatness, economy, cleanliness, and vigilance on board their ships, so that neither sickness nor rebellion had caused a loss for the Company, if the captains had been active, . . . and experts at business; if the Company had sent its expenditions to and from the most appropriate places--we know, for example, from reliable sources that during the war one could buy on the Gold Coast a fine male slave for 120 gallons of rum, and a fine female slave for 100 gallons of rum; and, finally, if the cargoes brought to St. Croix had been properly balanced as to the numbers of men, women, boys, and girls.

But if the employees of the Company who are concerned with the details of the trade have not followed the so-very-necessary rules listed above in every trading operation but especially in the Guinea trade, then one should not be surprised that the Company has suffered losses on its expeditions, but rather that the Company still exists.

From the year 1778 until today 5,089 slaves have been sold for the Guinea Company on St. Croix, namely: 2,342 adult male slaves; 1,214 adult female slaves; 927 boys; and 606 girls. All of these were delivered for 1,090,132 rigsdaler vestindisk courant or 214 rigsdaler apiece.

The report estimates the slaves brought to St. Croix cost the company about 653,948 rigsdaler vestindisk courant, so that slave trading should have yielded a profit of 436,184 rigsdaler.

The poor condition the ships of Captain Westmarker and Captain Terentz were in when they arrived at St. Croix in 1778 [because of disease on board] . . . naturally reduced very much the profit on the slaves sold here.

But what has been of particular importance in making the sale of slaves unprofitable on St. Croix was that the Royal Guinea

Trade Management [den kongelige Guineiske Handels Direktion] gave instructions on April 17, 1781, that of the slaves on the four ships then en route to St. Croix from Africa--the "Rio Volta," "Aira," "Christiansborg," and "Fredensburg"--only a limited number could be sold on St. Croix so that there would remain on each of the ships between 250 and 300 of the best slaves who were to be taken to St. Thomas to be sold there or, as circumstances might dictate, be sent on from St. Thomas for sale elsewhere; these instructions were not removed by subsequent letters of September 3, 1781, and March 26, 1782, but rather were made into a general rule. This step naturally has caused great discontent [Misfornøielse]; indeed, it has led to a feeling of hatred for the company among the St. Croix planters, who believed the purpose of the company was to supply this colony frequently with good slaves. Other merchants were in effect barred from participating in this particular branch of commerce because of the company's monopoly on trade with the Danish forts, especially Rio Volta, where the best slaves are and where there was no danger of being seized by the privateers of the warring powers.

Everyone who knows the least bit about the slave trade is aware that if, out of a cargo of 400 to 500 slaves, one removes 250 to 300 of the best, the remainder must be rather wretched material [uselt Tøj] and can not be worth close to 50 per cent as much as the choice ones. We might also add, for we know it with certainty, that nothing but the most extreme need for slaves can have induced the residents of St. Croix to purchase these rejects . . . . Many have belived that the losses which the Company has suffered in the French islands because of rejection of a certain number of slaves, unreliable debtors, often poor return cargoes, and the Guinea Company ships' long stopover and the costs that such a delay runs up, can have appreciably reduced the difference between the sales price of slaves on the French islands and the sales price on St. Croix.

We have stated all of these details [Omstaendigheder] without holding back anything because government servants ought not fear to speak the truth, and as we never suspect and even less cast aspersions on the motives [Hensigter] of others, so we are not ashamed to mention certain errors that have been committed whenever we happen to discover them and when we must mention them so that we can give the correct reasons for the lack of success of one or another branch of commerce.

It cannot be denied that 214 rigsdaler apiece is, in view of the difficulties and risks associated with the slave trade, not a concordant price. But if one wants, in addition to what has already been pointed out, further proof that this price is not the result so much of local conditions on St. Croix as of a combination of abundant bad luck and the poor condition of the slaves brought to St. Croix due to illness or rebellion on board the ships, then one can consult the enclosed Table A for more

detailed elucidation.[3] From it one can see that the mortality rate, especially during the journey from the Gold Coast to St. Croix, has been particularly great on most of the ships [see Appendix III]. This then is also proof that the slave cargoes have not been good, healthy ones. . . . The two ships previously used in whaling, the "Geheimeraad Guldberg" under command of Captain Beck and the "Grev Ernst Schimmelmann" under command of Captain Rasmus Boldt, will in particular be found to have suffered losses of about 40 per cent of the total number of slaves on board. The doctors appointed to this island have also noted that in general the surgeons on the ships of the Guinea Company are ignorant and unskilled. The planters easily pump [udfritte] information from the crew members and learn whether there has been a slave rising on board; and when they find out that there has been, they become less inclined to purchase slaves from that particular cargo.

When one adds the value of the select slaves that are sent away from St. Croix for sale on St. Thomas to the value of the slaves sold on St. Croix, it becomes apparent that the actual price of slaves arriving here has ranged from 220 to 240 rigsdaler apiece.[4] In the future, according to our best judgment, healthy and well-assorted slave cargoes will continue to be delivered here for between 230 and 240 rigsdaler apiece.

It is certainly important to guarantee the Danish West Indies a regular supply of good slaves. This matter deserves the greatest support of the General Customs Department [here referred to as det kongl. vestindiske Kammer].

The enclosed Table B shows that the supply of slaves to St. Croix with the ships of the Guinea Company does not amount to more than 508 slaves per year; one should also note that in 1782 and 1783 not one cargo of slaves was brought to St. Croix. As this colony needs at least three times the aforesaid number of slaves each year, we cannot see that any loss for the planters and residents would result were the Baltic-Guinea Company to be freed of all duty [Forpligtelse] to transport slaves to St. Croix in exchange for the Company's renunciation of its monopoly on the slave trade from Danish Guinea.[5]

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[3]In fact Table A, here used as Appendix III, shows that nearly all slaves brought to St. Croix were sold on the island and were not taken on to St. Thomas, as the colonial government charged.

[4]This is merely an attempt by the government, based on its false assertion that the better half of each slave cargo was withheld from sale on St. Croix, to show that prices for slaves on St. Croix were higher than they actually were.

[5]Actually, the Baltic-Guinea Company had no legal duty to supply slaves to St. Croix; it could and did sell slaves whereever prices were best. The "duty" which the colonial government refers to was a moral one only.

We propose (1) that all Danish ships and vessels, including those based at St. Croix (but not those from St. Thomas, because they are less likely to be Danish-owned), be allowed to visit all places on the Guinea Coast, including the Danish forts and establishments, for the purpose of buying slaves which they should be allowed to sell anywhere they desire; (2) that such ships be permitted to load, at any place in or outside of the King's states and colonies, the most suitable cargo with which to conduct trade on the Guinea Coast, in return for paying a double tax [Recognition] on each slave brought to St. Croix in instances where the consignment [Partøiet] has not sailed diectly from the King's European states or from St. Croix, or has visited foreign states during its journey; (3) that in regard to every type of cargo (with the single exception of slaves) which such ships might contain when they reach St. Croix, the ships are to be treated according to the customs regulations of the colony.

Because the English captains are in general better acquainted with the slave trade, have less fear of the influence of the climate on their health, and therefore work with greater pleasure and energy than most Danish captains; also because it is of such great importance for the outcome of an expedition that the captain understand the trade and be able to speak the most common language [English] on the Gold Coast [er det paa Kysten meest giaengse Sporg maegtig] and that he not become so ill or uncomfortable as a result of discouragement or yearning for his native land that he neglects to look after the best interests of the shipping company, we would think that in order to promote the slave trade an exception could be made to the rule which requires that a captain be a native-born Danish subject [indfødt dansk Undersaat] and that, on the contrary, the following rules could be accepted, by which in addition Danish first and second mates would be made into [klaekket] good captains for the slave trade: The captains of all Danish ships sailing to the coast shall hold Danish citizenship [danske Borger], but the first and second mates, as well as half the crew . . . shall be the King's native-born subjects; and neither the captains nor more than one-third of the crew shall be the subjects of warring powers.

It will be the responsibility of the party concerned [Vedkommende] when granting sea-passes to ships, especially on St. Croix, to make sure that all the owners of the ship for which a pass is requested are really Danish citizens and subjects, and no foreigner, neither directly nor indirectly, has a share in the consignment. Such careful study of each request for a sea-pass would mean less dependence on oaths--the sacred nature of oaths was only too seldom respected during the last war--and more dependence on local knowledge about the capability and situation of the person requesting a pass, and the trust which his assurances deserve. It can presumably be left up to the governor general or to the discretion of the West Indian government to decide against granting a pass to a ship based solely on the

circumstances of the case, without being responsible to anything other than their own duty and the royal government in those cases where a pass must be denied.

The slave trade is of such great importance and promises such a steady and certain circulation of capital for those who understand it and have the aptitude for entering it that we do not venture to advise that foreign ships be permitted to supply St. Croix with slaves . . . for it is certain that the Americans can sail with less expense than most other nations, especially ours, and would therefore soon undersell the Danish merchants if their ships were permitted to transport slaves to St. Croix.

On the other hand, we feel compelled to recommend that the following encouragement might be granted to domestic ships, including those registered on St. Croix: for every slave brought to St. Croix and sold here, the ship should be allowed to take to foreign places in or outside of Europe the following quantities of sugar: for an adult male slave, 2,000 pounds; for an adult female slave, 1,000 pounds; for an adolescent [halvvoxen] male slave, 600 pounds; for an adolescent female slave, 400 pounds.

The purpose of these humbly proposed regulations is to make the needs of this island a result of new trade freedoms for His Majesty's European subjects. We find no reason to adopt the view that the Guinea Company ought to have other privileges with regard to the slave trade. One might wish, however, to instruct the Guinea Company, in case a pressing shortage of slaves should develop on St. Croix, to transport slaves to St. Croix first and offer them for sale there in return for being allowed either to take out the amounts of sugar listed above to foreign places or to bring into the King's European states a similar quantity of foreign sugar; we do not see how such an encouragement could involve any appreciable harm for other Danish merchants . . . .

We have not had to dwell on the harmful influence and unsteady course [ustadige Gang] of monopoly privileges, because the fate of the many monopoly trading companies created in Denmark has demonstrated the value and usefulness of freedom of trade, and the patriot can now, with hopeful anticipation, look forward to less splendid [glimrende] but happier times for the state.[6]

The Government of the West Indies, October 15, 1787

Walterstorff Lindemann Colbiørnsen

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[6]By the time the colonial government made its report, the Baltic-Guinea Company had been replaced by a new company enjoying similar privileges.

APPENDIX VII

Slave Population on St. Croix, 1780-90

	Slaves	Births	Deaths
1780	22,409	398	625
1781	22,687	470	623
1782	22,448	407	1,118
1783	21,809	383	983
1784	21,808	518	485
1785	21,922	437	816
1786	22,081	444	658
1787	22,460	487	561
1788	22,525	419	656
1789	22,021	426	1,278
1790	21,847	366	731[a]

[a]DSA, Vestindisk-guineisk Rente samt Generaltoldkammer, Dokumenter vedkommende Kommissionen for Negerhandelens bedre Indretning og Ophaevelse, Negernes Antal paa St. Croix for Aarene fra 1780 til 1790 incl. The data are imperfect, of course, but suffice to indicate that a preponderance of deaths over births was normal and, occasionally at least, enormous.

APPENDIX VIII

The Slave Population on the Four Schimmelmann Plantations, 1772-83

Year	Men	Women	Boys	Girls	Total	Births	Deaths	Slaves Purchased
1773	385	311	125	153	998	33	34	28
1774	383	315	133	167	996	27	31	2
1775	378	316	138	164	1,005	31	25	0
1776	372	318	149	167	1,000	29	45	10
1777	358	314	157	173	1,008	27	41	19
1778	350	313	166	179	1,024	23	29	22
1779	336	321	172	191	1,030	31	50	35
1780	343	329	171	187	1,040	33	34	17
1781	346	318	177	198	1,027	28	39	0
1782	349	326	174	179	982	24	71	1
Avg. per year	360	318	156	176	1,011	286	399	134[a]

[a]DSA, Vestindisk-guineisk Rente samt Generaltoldkammer, Dokumenter vedkommende Kommissionen for Negerhandelens bedre Indretning og Ophaevelse, Tabelle über die Neger auf den Gräfl. v. Schimmelmannschen Plantagen. There are some minor discrepancies in the yearly totals. The large increase in deaths in 1782 was caused by smallpox and measles epidemics, according to the report of the Committee on the Slave Trade, p. 33.

APPENDIX IX

Married Slaves at Friedensberg and Friedensthal

In 1792 there were 220 married black couples in the Moravian congregations at Friedensberg and Friedensthal on St. Croix. In three instances both husband and wife were free, and thirteen marriages involved male slaves and free Negro women. Of the 204 marriages in which both partners were slaves, 128 of the couples had different owners or lived on different plantations, while only 76 had the same owner and lived on the same plantation. The preponderance of the former group suggests a surprising degree of slave mobility, though part of the explanation might be that slaves from different plantations met first at one of the missions and subsequently married, so that this group of slaves might not be representative of the population as a whole. But, if the data from the Moravian missions were only partially applicable to the rest of the slave population, they would nevertheless provide ample explanation for the slaves' desire to engage in those "night visits" on neighboring plantations of which Walterstorff complained.[1]

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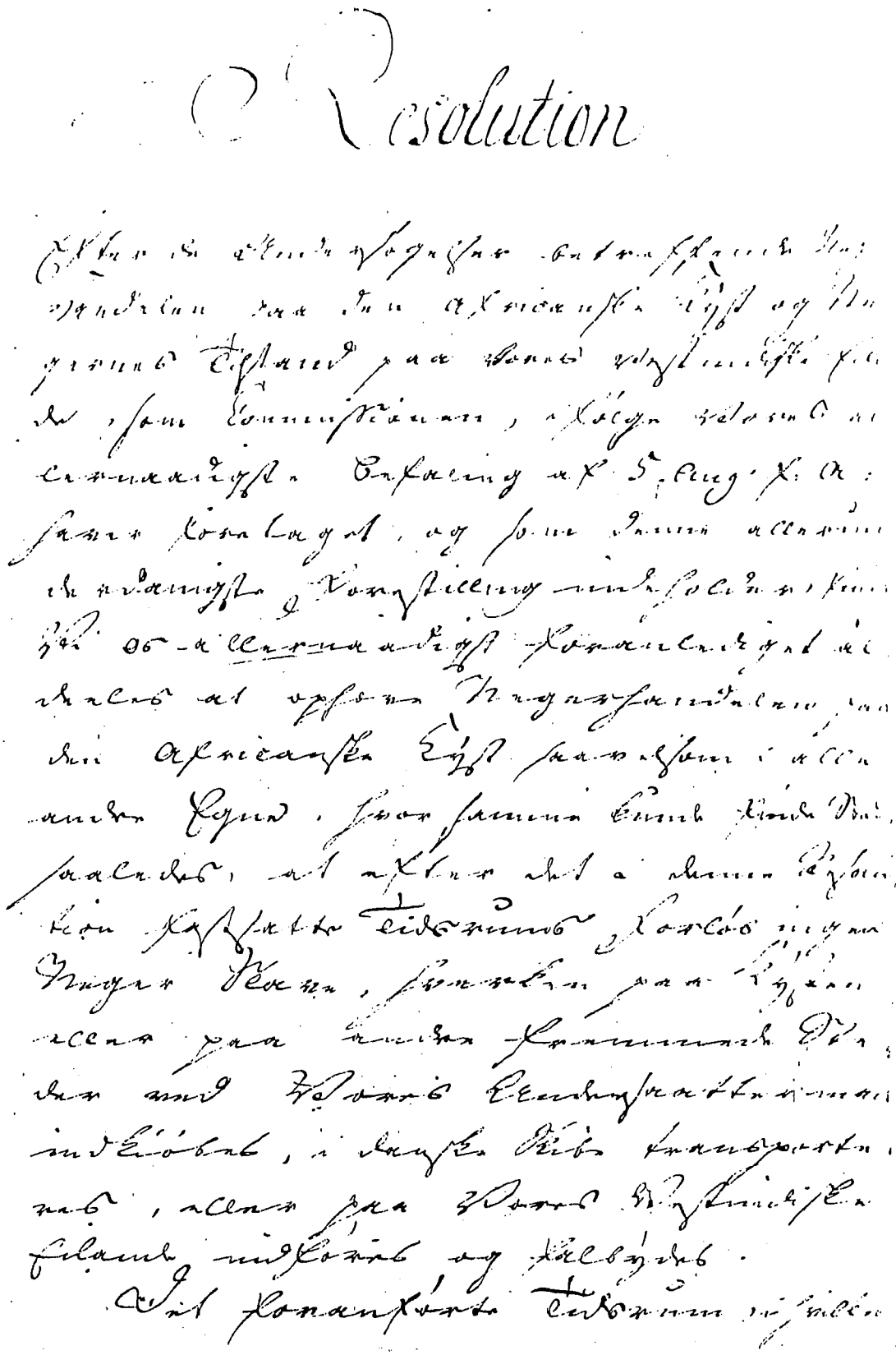
[1]DSA, VGRGT, Dokumenter vedkommende Negerhandelens bedre Indretning og Ophaevelse, Verzeichnis derer Neger Ehe-Paare, welche . . . zu Friedensberg und Friedensthal auf St. Croix . . . ehelich mit einander Verbunden worden . . . , St. Croix, November 15, 1792, pp. 1-7.

APPENDIX X



APPENDIX XI

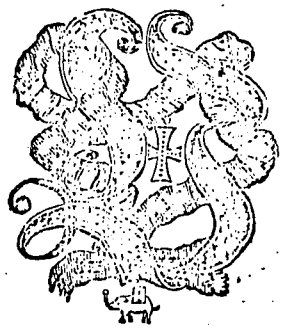
Forordning

om

Neger-Handelen.

Christiansborg Slot den 16de Martii 1792.

Kiøbenhavn,
trykt hos Directeur P. M. Hopffner, Hans Kongelige Majestæts
og Universitetets første Bogtrykker.



Christian den Syvende, af Guds Naade, Konge til Dannemark og Norge, de Vinders og Gothers, Hertug udi Slesvig, Holsten, Stormarn, Dytmarsken og Oldenborg, giøre alle vitterligt:

At, i Henseende til de Omstændigheder, som følge med Slavehandelen paa Kysten af Guinea og med de der kiøbte Negres Overførsel til Vore Vestindiske Øer, ogsaa i Betragtning af, at det i alle Henseender maatte være velgiørende og gavnligt, om Tilførsel af nye Negre fra Guinea-Kunde undværes og Vore Vestindiske Øers Dyrkning i Tiden bestrides med Arbeidere, som, paa Øerne fødte og opdragne, vare fra Ungdommen af vante til Arbeidet, Himmelstrøgnen og dem, under hvilke de skulle arbeide, have Vilkaar undersøge, hvorledes og naar dette maatte blive mueligt. Ved denne Undersøgelse er det blevet sat uden for Tvivl, at det kan blive mueligt og er fordelagtigt for Vore Vestindiske Øer at undværre Indkiøb af nye Negre, naar Plantagerne engang ere blevne forsynede med tilstrækkeligt Antal i det for Formerelsen fornødne Forhold; naar Understøttelser for de Plantage-Eiere, som dertil trænge, kunne gjøres mueligе, og der sørges for at fremme Negrenes Ægteskaber, Oplærelse og Sædelighed.

For altsaa at sætte Vore Vestindiske Besiddelser udaf den Afhængenhed, hvori de vare og ere i Henseende til Negres Tilførsel, og forom sider at giøre Alt-

Negres Tilførsel unedvendig, er det at Vi nu til hver Mands Efterretning kundgiøre Vor allernaadigste Villie om en Deel herhen herende, som nu behøver strax at bekiendtgiøres, og herved saaledes byde og befale:

1.

Med Begyndelsen af Aaret 1803 ville Vi, at al Negerhandel for Vore Undersaatter skal ophøre paa de Afrikanske Kyster, og ellers hvor den kunde finde Sted uden for Vore Besiddelser i Vestindien, saaledes, at efter dette Tidsrums Udløb ingen Neger eller Negerinde enten paa Kysten eller paa andre fremmede Steder maae ved eller for Vore Undersaatter indkiøbes, i Vore Undersaatters Skibe føres, eller til Vore Vestindiske Øer til Salg indføres, og at al mod dette Forbud stridende Handel skal efter denne Tid ansees som ulovlig.

2.

Imidlertid, fra nu af nemlig og indtil Udgangen af Aaret 1802, maae det være tilladt for alle Nationer uden Forskiel og under alle Flage at indføre Negre og Negerinder fra Kysten til Vore Vestindiske Øer.

3.

For de sunde og friske Negre og Negerinder, som i denne Tid saaledes indføres til Vore Vestindiske Øer, bevilge Vi, at følgende Partier raae Sukkre maae i egne eller fremmede Skibe inden eet Aar fra Indførselen udføres fra Øerne til fremmede Steder i eller uden for Europa, nemlig for hver voxen Neger eller Negerinde 2000 Pd. brutto, og for hver halvvoxen det halve, nemlig 1000 Pd., uden Forskiel i Henseende til Kiønnene; men for Børn intet.

4.

Den i Forordningerne af 9 April 1764 og 12 May 1777, hvilke i Henseende til Negerhandelen herved for Resten hæves, bestemte Afgivt ved Slavers Indførsel, ville Vi allernaadigst ganske eftergive for de Negerinder, som herefter indføres; hvorimod af de Sukkre, som for indførte Negre eller Negerinder udføres til fremmede Steder, erlægges i udgaaende Told ½ Procent meer, end der nu er paabudet.

5.

Videre ville Vi, i Henseende til det rette Forhold mellem Kiønnene, fra Begyndelsen af Aaret 1795 og for den følgende Tid eftergive Kopskatten af de Neger-Qvinder eller Piger, som arbeide paa Plantagerne, og ikke ere Huus-Negerinder, hvorimod fra samme Tid at regne denne Afgivt erlægges dobbelt af alle Plantage-Mands-Negre.

6. Ud-

6.

Udførsel af Negre og Negerinder fra Vore Vestindiske Øer forbydes fra nu af paa det strængeste, og undtages fra dette Forbud allene de, som Lovene byde at udgaae, samt de, hvilke Vor General-Gouvernøur og Regierung paa de Vestindiske Øer i meget enkelte Tilfælde efter Omstændighederne maatte troe sig befeiet til at lade udgaae.

Hvorefter alle og enhver kunne vide sig at rette og forholde. Givet paa Vort Slet Christiansborg udi Vor Kongelige Residents-Stad Kiøbenhavn den 16 Martii 1792.

Under Vor Kongelige Haand og Segl.

Christian R.

Scheel. Hagerup. Trant.

Rosenstand Goiske.

VITA

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